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George Bancroft

ANNEX

THE

# WORKS

OF

# RICHARD HURD, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF WORCESTER.

VOL. VI.

Printed by J. Nichols and Son,
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THE

# WORKS

OF

# RICHARD HURD, D. D.

## LORD BISHOP OF WORCESTER.

IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

VOL. VI.

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# THEOLOGICAL WORKS

VOL. II.

# SERMONS

PREACHED AT

# LINCOLN'S-INN,

BETWEEN THE YEARS 1765 AND 1776:

WITH

## A LARGER DISCOURSE,

ON

## CHRIST'S DRIVING THE MERCHANTS OUT OF THE TEMPLE;

IN WHICH THE NATURE AND END OF THAT FAMOUS TRANSACTION IS EXPLAINED.

---

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TO THE

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THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR MANY AND

GREAT FAVOURS,

ARE BY THE AUTHOR

MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

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# SERMON I.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 3, 1771.

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ST. MATTH. xiii. 51, 52.

*Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

IF there be any difficulty in these words, it will be removed by considering the *manners* of that time, in which Jesus lived, and the *ideas* of those persons, to whom he addressed himself.

The Israelites were a plain, frugal people; abundantly supplied with all things needful to the convenient support of life, but very sparingly with such as come under the notion of ornaments or superfluities. They drew their means of subsistence chiefly from pasturage, agriculture, and other rural occupations. Gold and Silver was scarce among the ancient Jews; and the less necessary to them, as they had little traffic among themselves, and still less with their pagan neighbours; the wisdom of their Law having purposely restrained, and, upon the matter, prohibited, all the gainful ways of commerce.

Now, to a people, thus circumstanced, unfurnished, in a good degree, with arts and manufactures, and but slenderly provided with the *means of exchange* for the commodities they produce; management, thrift, and what we call *good husbandry*, must have been a capital virtue. *Householders* were especially concerned to hoard up, and keep by them, in readiness, all such things as might be requisite either to cloath or feed their respective families. And therefore, as they were continually making fresh additions to their stock, so they carefully preserved what things they had, provided they were of a nature to be preserved, although

time and use had impaired the grace, or diminished the value, of them. Thus, they had things *new and old* laid up in their store-house, or *treasury* (for these provisions were indeed their *treasure)*, which, as the text says, they could *bring forth*, on any emergency that called for them.

And to this Jewish *Householder*, thus furnished and prepared for all occasions, our Lord compares *the scribe, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, in other words, the minister, or preacher of the Gospel. Every such *scribe* was to be suitably provided with what might be serviceable to those committed to his charge: And the Text delivers it, as *a general inference* from the example of Christ himself (who, from a variety of topics, some *new*, some *old*, had been instructing his disciples in this chapter), that WE, the teachers of his religion, should likewise have in store a variety of knowledge for the supply of his church, and that we should not be backward or sparing, as we see occasion, in the use of it. THEREFORE, says he, that is, *for this end*[a] that your re-

[a] διὰ τοῦτο—referring to the good effect of this way of teaching on the disciples, whom it had enabled, as they confessed, to *understand* the things, which Jesus had taught them.

spective charges may be well and perfectly instructed by you, as you have been by me, *every scribe, which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

It is true, if this instruction of our Lord and Master had concerned *only* the preachers of the word, I might have found a fitter place and occasion for a discourse upon it. But the case is much otherwise; and it concerns *all* the faithful to understand what the duty of those is, who are intrusted to dispense the word of life, lest they take offence at the ministry, without cause, and so deprive themselves of the fruit which they might otherwise reap from it.

Let me therefore lay before you some plain considerations on the aphorism in the text; and submit it to yourselves how far they may deserve the notice of all Christians.

It would be ridiculous, no doubt, to torture a meer figure of speech; and to pursue a metaphor through all the minute applications, which an ordinary imagination might find or invent for it. But I shall not be suspected of

trifling in this sort, when I only conclude, from the comparison of a *Christian Scribe* to the *Jewish Householder*;

I. That all the treasures of knowledge, which the MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL may have laid up in his mind, are destined, *not to the purposes of vanity, but to the use of his charge*; for such must have been the intention of a reasonable *Householder*, in the stock of provisions he had so carefully collected:

II. That such use must be estimated from the apparent *wants of those, to whom this knowledge is dispensed*; for so the frugal *householder* expends his provisions on those who evidently stand in need of them: And

III. Lastly, That among these wants, some, at certain conjunctures, may be *more general*, or *more pressing*, than ordinary; and then his first care must be to relieve these, though other real, and perhaps considerable wants, be, for the present, neglected by him: just, again, as the discreet *householder* is anxious to provide against an uncommon distress that befalls his whole family, or the greater part of it, or that threatens the immediate destruction of those whom it befalls, though he sus-

pend his care, for a season, of particular, or less momentous distresses.

In these THREE respects, then, I propose to illustrate and enforce the comparison of the Text, without any apprehension of being thought to do violence to it.

I. The knowledge of a *well-instructed Scribe* must be directed to the edification of his charge, and not at all to the gratification of his own vanity.

This conclusion results immediately from the *subject* of the comparison. For the *Christian Scribe* is not compared to a *prince*, who is allowed, and even expected, to consult his own state and magnificence; or, to one of those popular *magistrates* in ancient times, whose office it was to exhibit splendid shews, and furnish expensive entertainments, to their fellow-citizens; but to a plain Jewish *householder*, who had nothing to regard beyond the necessary, or, at most, decent accommodation of his family.

And the comparison is *aptly* made, as we shall see if we consider, either the *end* of a

preacher's office, or the *decorum* of his character.

His OFFICE obliges him to intend the most essential interests of mankind, the reformation of their lives, and the salvation of their souls. And when the object of his care is so important, what wonder if all inferior considerations fall before it?

Besides, the Christian preacher has a *commission* to discharge, a divine *message* to deliver. And in such a case, men look not for ingenuity, but fidelity. An ancient, or a modern sophist may make what excursions he thinks fit into the wide fields of science; and may entertain us with his learning, or his wit, as he finds himself able. He *may*, I say, do this; for he has only to recommend himself to our esteem, and to acquire a little popular reputation. But WE have *a dispensation* committed to us, *a form of sound words*, from which we must not depart, *a doctrine*, which we are to deliver with *uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity* [b]. We please not men, but God; or if men, *to their good*, only, *to edification* [c].

[b] Tit. ii. 7. [c] Rom. xv. 2.

The DECORUM of our character requires, too, that we be superior to all the arts of vanity and ostentation. Even in secular professions, it is expected that this rule of propriety be observed. A *Physician* would be ridiculous, that was more curious in penning a prescription, than in weighing the matter of it: and the *Advocate* would be little esteemed, that should be more solicitous to display himself, than to serve his client. How much more then may it be expected from *a preacher of righteousness*, that HE should forget his own personal importance amid the high concerns of his profession!

And such was indeed the conduct of our best guides, in the ministry. The ancient Fathers were, many of them, richly furnished with all the endowments, that might be required to set themselves off to the utmost advantage. Yet we find them, in their homilies and discourses to the people, inattentive to every thing but their main end; delivering themselves, with an energy indeed, but a plainness and even negligence of expression [d],

[d] They did this with design, and on principle; as appears from St. Austin's discourse *de Doctrinâ Christianâ*, in which he instructs the Christian preacher to employ, on

that tempts frivolous readers, sometimes, to make a doubt of their real, and, from other monuments of their skill and pains, unquestioned abilities.

And, in this contempt of secular fame, they did but copy the example of St. Paul himself, the great Apostle of the Gentiles; who, though distinguished by the sublimest parts, though profound in his knowledge of the Law, and not unacquainted with Gentile learning, affected no display either of his natural or acquired talents, but, as he tells us himself (and his writings attest the truth of his declaration), *determined to know nothing*, among the faithful, *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*[e].

Not that what abilities we have, are always to lie concealed. There are occasions, no doubt, when they may properly, that is, use-

some occasions, inelegant and even barbarous terms and expressions, the better to suit himself to the apprehensions of his less informed hearers—*non curante illo, qui docet, quantâ eloquentiâ doceat, sed quantâ evidentiâ. Cujus evidentiæ diligens appetitus aliquando negligit verba cultiora, nec curat quid benè sonet, sed quid benè indicet atque intimet quod ostendere intendit*—and what follows. L. iv. p. 74. Ed. Erasm. t. iii.

[e] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

fully, be exerted. But the minister of the Gospel does not go in quest of such occasions: he only adapts himself to them, when they come in his way; and then pursues them no farther than the end, he has in view, the edification of others, not his own credit, demands from him.

By this rule, the preachers of the word are to conduct themselves. By the same rule, it will, therefore, be but just to estimate their charitable labours; and, when we see nothing to admire in them, to conclude, That this plainness of character may not be always owing to incapacity, but sometimes, at least, to discretion and the higher regards of duty.

And this candour, as liable as it is to misinterpretation, will not be thought excessive, if you reflect, that, as, in general, they are bound to consult the good of their charge, and to deliver nothing to their auditors, but what they foresee, or presume at least, will be *useful* to them: So

II. In the next place, The *degree* of that utility must be regarded by the prudent dispenser of God's word, and can only be estimated

by the apparent *wants* of those, to whom his instructions are addressed.

It is an especial part of the *householder's* prudence to take care, that his treasure be laid out on those, who have most need of it. He has enough to do, perhaps, to satisfy the more pressing demands of his domestics; and the rules of a good œconomy require that he regard those, before their humourous inclinations, or even their more tolerable necessities. To speak in Jewish ideas, He, that wants a *coat*, to defend himself from the injuries of the weather, must be supplied with that necessary garment, though he go without a *cloak;* or, when a piece of *bread* is called for, it must be administered to the hungry, though others be made to wait for their delicacies of *milk* and *honey*; or, a lamb from the fold may be served up at an ordinary feast, while the *fatted calf* is reserved for some more solemn occasion.

Just thus it is in the dispensation of the word. We apply ourselves, first and principally, to relieve the more importunate demands of our hearers; and, not being able, at the same time, to provide for all, we prefer the case of those who are starving for the want of necessary instruction, to that of others who are in a

condition to subsist on what hath already been imparted to them.

Hence it is, that we are most frequent in pressing the fundamental truths of the Gospel: as well knowing, that very many have yet to learn, or at least to digest, the first principles of their religion; and that few, in comparison, are either prepared, or enough disposed, *to go on to perfection.*

There are those, perhaps, who expect us to clear up some nice point of casuistry, or to lay open to them the grounds and reasons of some obnoxious article in the Christian Creed: in a word, they would take it kindly of us, if, dropping the common topics, which have been long and much worn in the service of religion, we provided some fresh ones, for their entertainment; and instead of the stale fragments, which are always at hand, and lie open to all the family, we served up to them something of better taste from the inner rooms of our store-house, where our choicest viands are laid up. All this is extremely well: and in due season, so far as is fitting, the charitable dispenser of God's word will not be wanting to their expectations; for he has gathered nothing, however rare or exquisite, in the course of his

*household* industry, of which he does not wish them to partake. But, for the present, he finds this indulgence to be out of place: he sees, that the plainest duties of life, and the most unquestioned articles of the faith, are, first of all, to be inculcated: he perceives, that numbers want to be put in mind of old practical truths; and perhaps he understands, that even those, who are the most forward to call out for novelties in speculation, do not make this demand with the best grace. He could amuse them, it may be, with a curious theological Lecture: but what if their sense of divine things be dead? what if they want to have their minds stimulated by the admonitions, and their consciences alarmed with the terrors, of the Gospel?

The question is not put at hazard. For so, the Roman Governor was impatient *to hear St. Paul concerning the faith in Christ;* when yet the Apostle chose to *reason* with him *of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come:* plain moral topics, such as had often been discussed before him in the schools of philosophy, but were now resumed to good purpose; for in the end, we are told, *Felix trembled.*

Even, in the case of those, who may be decent in their lives, who are enough instructed in what is called morality, nay, and would take it ill to be thought wanting in a competent share of religious knowledge, a discourse on *the elements of the faith* may not be, altogether, unseasonable. For there are, of these, who exclude *Religion*, from their scheme of morality; or *Christianity*, from their scheme of religion; or who, professing Christianity, scarce know what *Redemption* means: who are yet to learn with what awful, yet filial piety, they are to look up to God *the Father*; who reflect not, what transcendant honour is due from them to God *the Son*; and who have scarce, perhaps, heared, or have little regarded, whether there *be any Holy Ghost*.

If any such attend our assemblies, think not much that we are ready to impart to them the plainest, the commonest, because the most *necessary*, instruction: and, though we would consult the wants of all, you are not to be surprized, or disgusted, if we run to the relief of those first, who want our assistance most; and, like the good *householder*, bestow our *old things* on the needy and indigent, before we expend our *new* on the curious and delicate; who might, we will say, be better accommo-

dated with them, but are not, in the mean time, destitute of what is needful to their spiritual life. But

III. This care is more especially required of the Christian Scribe, when his charge is exposed, in certain conjunctures, to new and extraordinary wants, which, if not relieved in the instant, may grow to be ruinous, and absolutely fatal: then, above all, he is to consider, not what instruction is most acceptable to his hearers, but what their critical situation demands.

For, here again, the example of the watchful and beneficent *householder*, is our direction. The season may be uncommonly severe and inclement: or, a dangerous, perhaps a contagious disease, afflicts his family; and then the warmest, although the coarsest, clothing must be sought out for the *naked;* and not the most palatable, but the most wholesome food, must be administered to the *sick.*

Disasters, like these, sometimes befall the household of Christ. A cold atheistic spirit prevails, and chills the vital principles of all virtue, as well as religion: or a pestilent heresy spreads its venom through the church,

and turns the medicine of life itself, the salutary instruction of God's word, unless prepared and applied by skilful hands, into a deadly poison. Then it is that the well-appointed Scribe emulates the generous care and pains of the good *householder*; and whatever he has in store, of ancient or modern collection, whether of philosophy or criticism, whether of eloquent persuasion or sound logic, all must be brought forth, to warm the piety, or to purify the faith, of his hearers.

We, of this nation, have not been so happy as to want examples of such distresses.

1. The fanatical sects, that sprung up in abundance amid the confusions of the last century, had so corrupted the word of God by their impure glosses on the Gospel-doctrine of Grace, that the age became immoral on principle, and, under the name of *Saints*, engendered a hateful brood of profligate *Antinomians*; that is, a sort of Christians, if they may be so called, *who turned the grace of God into licentiousness*, and, to magnify his goodness, very conscientiously transgressed his Laws. In a word, they taught, that the *elect* were above ordinances, and might be

saved without, nay in defiance of, the moral Law.

This horrid divinity struck so directly at the root of all true religion, that it could not but alarm the zeal of good men. Accordingly, about the time of the Restoration, and for some years after it, a number of eminent Divines (and ONE especially, well known, and deservedly honoured, in this place[f]) bent all their nerves to expose and confound so pernicious a heresy: and with so invincible a force of plain and perspicuous reasoning, as brought most men to their senses, and effectually silenced, or disgraced, the rest. They opened the grounds and obligations of morality so plainly, and set the Gospel scheme of salvation *through faith, working by charity*, in so full and striking a light, that injured *Virtue* recovered her ancient honours, and yet was taught to acknowledge a just dependance on saving *Faith*.

Such was the triumph of enlightened reason and well-interpreted Scripture over *Antinomianism*: while yet many perverse, and more mistaken, hearers of those days, were ready to revile their teachers, for dwelling so much and

[f] Archbishop Tillotson.

so long on these *old* topics, and would have gladly received other, and more *novel* instructions, at their hands.

2. But now the licence of that age, which followed the Restoration, was gone over, on the sudden, into other extravagances, equally ruinous to the souls of men.

It had been made too clear to be denied, that moral righteousness is of indispensable obligation, so long as there is a God to serve, or common sense is allowed to have any hand in explaining his laws. To get rid then of so inconvenient a restraint, as genuine morality; many daring spirits of that time, rushed into *Atheism;* while the more timid, took refuge in *Popery*. For, to disown a moral Governour, or to admit that any observances of superstition can release men from the duty of obeying him, equally serves the purpose of those, who resolve to be as wicked as they dare, or as little virtuous as they can.

These new evils, each of which, in its turn, the court itself had countenanced, or introduced, called for fresh remedies; and it was not long before they were administered, with effect. The same eminent persons, who had vindicated moral virtue, now supported the

cause of *piety*, and of *protestantism*, with equal success. They overturned all the prophaneness, and all the philosophy of *Atheism*, from its foundations: and, with resistless argument, baffled the presumption, and beat down the sophistry, of the church of Rome. Yet these matchless servants of truth were charged by some, with indiscretion in bringing to light all the horrors of atheistic impiety, though in order to expose them; and with preposterous zeal, in directing all their efforts against Popery, though it wore, at that time, so malignant an aspect on all our dearest interests.

They were not, however, diverted by these clamours from pursuing their honest purposes: and we owe it to them, in a great measure, that these two systems of iniquity, I mean, Atheism, and Popery, are no longer in repute among us.

3. Still, the state of the times may be altered, without being much improved. For, though few will avow direct Atheism, and not many, I hope, are proselyted to Popery, yet the number of those is not small, who are but Protestants, in name; and scarce Deists, in reality. Many profess, or secretly entertain,

a disbelief of all revealed Religion; and many more take unwarrantable liberties with the Christian faith, though they pretend to respect it. At the same time, as extremes beget each other, there are those who seem relapsing into the old exploded fanaticism of the last age; from a false zeal, it may be, to counteract the ill impression of those other licentious principles.

Thus is the unbalanced mind of man always shifting from one excess into another; and rarely knows to sustain itself in that just *mean*, which pure religion and right reason demand. Wonder not therefore, that our cares are still suited to the exigencies of our hearers; and that we labour to supply them with that provision of sacred truth, which they most want; that we strive to excite in them awful ideas of God's moral government; are *instant in season and out of season* to assert the utility, the importance, the necessity of divine revelation; and are anxious to maintain the prerogatives of Christian faith, yet without depreciating the moral Law, or infringing the rights of natural reason: that we admonish you to think soberly, to inquire modestly, and to believe what the word of God expressly teaches, though ye do not, and can not, many times,

comprehend the height and depth of divine wisdom: that we remember, in short, what is required of Stewards, who are appointed to dispense the treasures of Christian knowledge, and to superintend the *household* of God.

I have now gone through the several topics, which our Lord's parable of the *Householder* seemed naturally to suggest to me: not so much with a view to make our own apology (for if we do not our duty, we deserve, and if we do, we want, none) as to set before you a just idea of our office and ministry, that so ye may judge rightly and equitably of us, for your own sakes. For it is not indifferent to the *household*, what opinion is entertained of the *Householder*. Many will not suffer him to *relieve* their wants, or perhaps acknowledge they *have* any *wants* to be relieved, if they do not conceive with some respect of his discretion, at least, and good-will.

And though, in the discharge of our duty to all, we may seem to neglect many, and may even dissatisfy, nay offend some; yet, on reflexion, you will see that we are not wanting to our trust—if we always endeavour to dispense *salutary* doctrines—if, especially, we dispense *such* as the apparent and urgent necessities of

men call for—and, above all, if we be ready to dispense *all* our treasures, *new* and *old*, when the more alarming distresses of the Christian church require, on occasion, our best attention and liberality.

To conclude: We respect your good opinion; nay, perhaps, are too solicitous to obtain it. But we would, or we should, in the first place, please him, who hath called us to *serve*, and expects us to be *faithful, in all his house*[g]. For we presume to be something more than Orators, or Philosophers, plausible and artificial discoursers, who have nothing in view but their own credit, and are eloquent or ingenious, that is, *vain*, by profession. We have a character to sustain of greater dignity, but less ostentation. *For* WE *preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord; and ourselves, your servants for Jesus sake*[h].

[g] Heb. iii. 2. [h] 2 Cor. iv. 5.

# SERMON II.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 8, 1767.

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1 COR. x. 15.

*I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*

THOUGH St. Paul said this to the Corinthians, on a particular occasion, in reference to a single argument he was then prosecuting, and possibly not without an intended sarcasm on those whom he here qualifies with the name of *Wise men*, yet the words themselves express the Apostle's *own constant practice*; and what is more, they express the *general spirit and genius* of that Religion, which he was commissioned to teach.

For the Christian Religion, divine as it is in its origin, sublime in its precepts, and profound in its mysteries, yet condescends to apply itself to the rational faculties of mankind; and, secure in its own native truth and evidence, challenges the wise and learned to *judge* of its pretentions.

So that we may regard the declaration of the text, as a standing precept to the Ministers of the word, *to speak as to wise men;* and to the hearers of it, to use their best faculties, *in judging of what they say.*

These then shall be the *two parts* of my discourse upon it. *Each* will suggest some important reflexions to the persons respectively concerned; to US, who preach the word, and to YOU, who hear it.

I. The Religion of Jesus was designed for the instruction of all sorts and degrees of men. Nay, it is even alledged as one mark of its divinity by Jesus himself, that not only the rich and wise, but the *poor* and simple, *have the Gospel preached unto them*[i]. And from the different reception of it, at first, by these

[i] Matt. xi. 15.

two sets of men, we may perhaps see which of them deserved it most. But be this as it will, the Christian Religion was destined for the use of all mankind. Its saving truths are to be made known to all: yet with some difference in the *mode* of teaching them, according to the capacities of those to whom they are addressed.

To PLAIN AND ILLITERATE MEN, who have no prejudices to counteract the virtue of God's word, and no pride of reason or science to question its authority, the true and proper way is, no doubt, to represent the great truths of the Gospel, simply and clearly, accompanied with its more general and obvious proofs, and enforced upon them with all the earnestness of exhortation. These *proofs*, and this *exhortation*, carry such light and force in them, as may be reasonably expected to have an effect upon all men: yet to the WISE, who are prompted by their curiosity, to habits of inquiry, to *ask a reason of the hope that is in us*[k], and who are qualified by their parts and studies to *judge* of such reason, we are instructed to address a more elaborate *answer*, or apology.

k 1 Pet. iii. 3.

The question then will be, ON WHAT PRINCIPLES SUCH APOLOGY MUST BE FORMED? A question the more important, because the apologies of all times have been too generally constructed on false and pernicious principles; on *such* as cannot support, but rather tend to weaken and disgrace, the very cause they would defend.

Such were the apologies, many times, of the *ancient Christians*, who would incorporate with the divine religion of Jesus the vain doctrines of the Gentile philosophy: and such have been too often the more *modern apologies*, which debase the word of God, and corrupt it, with the dreams of our presumptuous metaphysics.

Our Religion has suffered much in both these ways: not, that reason or philosophy of any kind, truly so called, can dis-serve the cause of a *divine* Religion; but that we reason and philosophize *falsely*, or *perversely*; that is, we apply falshood to truth; or, we misapply truth itself, in subjecting the incomprehensible mysteries of our faith to the scrutiny and minute discussion of our best reason.

From these miscarriages, we are admonished what to *avoid:* the example of the Apostle Paul, who *spake as to wise men,* may instruct us in the right way of *prosecuting* the defence of the Gospel.

From *him,* then, we learn to frame our answers and apologies to inquisitive men, on the great established truths of natural and revealed Religion; to assert the expediency of divine Revelation, from the acknowledged weakness and corruption of human nature, and from the moral attributes of the Deity; to illustrate the œconomy of God's dispensations to mankind by arguments taken from that œconomy itself: to reason with *reverence* [1] on the nature of those dispensations, to shew what their general scope and purpose is, how perfect an agreement there is between them, and how divinely they are made to depend on each other.

In doing this, we shall find room for the exercise of our best and most approved reason: we shall look far ourselves, (and be able to let others) into the harmony of the divine councils, as they are set before us in the inspired volumes: and, though we may not penetrate

[1] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

all the depths and obscurities of those councils, yet, as in contemplating the WORKS of God, which we know but in part, we can demonstrate his *eternal power and Godhead*, so, in studying his WORD, we shall see enough of his unsearchable wisdom and goodness, *to put to silence the ignorance of foolish*, and to satisfy the inquiries of *wise*, men.

I say, *to satisfy the inquiries of wise men:* for *wise men* do not expect to have all difficulties in a divine system cleared up, and every minute question, which may be raised about it, answered (for *this*, God himself, the author and finisher of it, can only perform, and much *less* than this is abundantly sufficient for our purpose); but all they desire is to see the several parts of it so far cleared up, and made consistent with each other, and, upon the whole, to discover such evident marks of a superior wisdom, power, and goodness in the frame and texture of it, as may convince them that it is truly divine, and worthy of the Supreme Mind to whom we ascribe it.

When we speak *thus* as to *wise men*, we do all that *wise men* can require of us: if others be still unsatisfied, the fault is in themselves; they are *curious*, but not wise.

I lay the greater stress on this mode of defending the Christian Religion from *itself*; that is, by arguments taken from its own nature and essence, because it shortens the dispute with inquirers, and secures the honour of that Religion, we undertake to defend.

First, *It shortens the dispute with Inquirers*, by cutting off the consideration of all those objections which men raise out of their own imaginations. The defender of Christianity is not concerned to obviate every idle fancy, that floats in the head of a visionary objector. Men have not the making of their Religion, but must take it for such as the Scriptures represent it to be. And if we defend it on the footing of such representation, we do all that can be reasonably required of us. It is nothing to the purpose what men may imagine to themselves concerning the marks and characters of a divine Revelation: it is enough, that there are *such marks and characters* in the Religion of Jesus (whether more or fewer, whether the same or other, than we might previously have expected, is of no moment) as shew it, in all reasonable construction, to be *divine*. And thus our labour with Inquirers is much abridged, while all foreign and impertinent questions are rejected and laid aside.

Next, this *mode* of defence *secures the honour of that religion, we undertake to support.* For, if we fail in our endeavours to unfold some parts of the *Christian system,* we are but in the condition of those, who would experimentally investigate and clear up some difficulties in *the system of nature.* Want of care, or diligence, or sagacity, may subject both the Divine and the Philosopher to some mistakes: but either system is the same still, and lies open to the pains and attention of more successful inquirers. Nobody concludes that the system of nature is not divine, because this or that Philosopher has been led by hasty experiments to misconceive of it. And nobody *should* conclude otherwise of the Christian system, though the Divine should err as much in his scriptural comments and explications. Whereas, when we attempt to vindicate Christianity on principles not clearly contained in the word of God, we act like those who form physical theories on principles which have no foundation in *fact.* The consequence is, That not only the labour of *each* is lost, but the system itself, which each would recommend, being hastily taken for what it is unskilfully represented to be, is vilified and disgraced. For thus the *Christian system* has in fact been reviled by such as have seen, or *would* only

see it, through the false medium of Popish or Calvinistical ideas: and thus the *system of nature itself* hath, it is said, been blasphemed by ONE [m], who judged of it from the intricacies of a certain astronomical hypothesis. The remedy for this evil, is, to solve scriptural difficulties by scriptural principles, and to account for natural appearances by experimental observations: and then, though the application of each may be mistaken, the system remains inviolate, and the honour both of God's WORD and WORKS is secured.

And let thus much suffice, at present, for the duty *of him, who speaketh as to wise men.* Much more indeed is required to the *integrity*, and still more to the *success*, of his defence. But he that *speaketh, as the oracles of God*, that is, who defends a divine Religion on its own divine principles, does that which is most essential to his office; and eminently discharges the part of a *wise speaker*, since he plans his *defence* in the best manner.

[m] ALPHONSUS THE WISE—I go on the common supposition, that this Prince intended a reflexion on the *system of nature* itself; but, perhaps, his purpose was no more than, in a strong way of expression, (though it must be owned, no very decent one) to reprobate the *hypothesis* [the *Ptolemaic*], which set that system in so bad a light.

II. It now remains to consider the other part of the text, which challenges *the wise men*, to whom the Apostle *spake*, to JUDGE of what he said to them.

From the time, this *challenge* was given by the learned Apostle, there never have been wanting *wise men*, disposed and forward to accept it. And thus far, all was well: for they had a right to exercise this office of *judging for themselves*, if they were, indeed, capable of it. But have they considered, to what that *capacity* amounts? and that much more is required to make a good JUDGE, than a good SPEAKER?

Let us briefly *examine* then the pretentions of those, who have at all times been so ready to sit in judgement on the Advocates for Religion, by the known qualities of a capable Judge: which, I think, are *Knowledge*, *Patience*, *Impartiality*, *Integrity*, under which last name I include *Courage*.

1. The first requisite in a Judge, is a competent *knowledge* in the subject of which he judges, without which his other qualities, how respectable soever, are rendered useless. Nor is this knowledge, in the present case, incon-

siderable. For, to say nothing of *sacred and prophane Antiquity*, to say nothing of the *Sciences*, and above all, the science of *Ethics*, in its largest extent, the *Judge* of religious controversy must be well versed, because the *Advocate* is required to be *supremely* so, in the great *principles and doctrines* of natural and revealed Religion. To decide on *the merits of Christianity*, without this knowledge, would be as absurd, as to decide on *the merits of the English jurisprudence*, without an acquaintance with the *common law*, and the *Statute-book*.

2. The next quality, required in a Judge, is *Patience*, or a deliberate unwearied attention to the arguments and representations of the Advocate, pleading before him. This attention is more especially expected, when the subject in debate is important, when it is, besides, intricate, and when the Advocate is able.

But these circumstances all concur, in the case before us. If the question concerning the truth and authority of Revelation be a cause of any moment at all, it is confessedly of the greatest: Again, if the scheme of Revelation be, as it pretends to be, *divine*, it must require the best application of our best faculties

to comprehend it; and, lastly, as the ablest men of all times, of every profession and denomination, have appeared in its defence, such advocates may demand to be heared with all possible attention. For the Judge of such a cause, then, to confide in his own first thoughts, to listen negligently and impatiently, and to precipitate his determination, must be altogether unworthy the character he assumes.

3 It is expected of a Judge that he be strictly *impartial*; that he come to the trial of a cause without any previous bias on his mind, or any passionate and prevailing prejudices, in regard either to persons or things, which may indispose him to see the truth, or to respect it. And this turn of mind, so conducive to a right determination in all cases, is the more necessary here, where so many secret prejudices are apt, without great care, to steal in and corrupt the judgement.

4. The last quality, which men require in a Judge, is an inflexible *Integrity:* such as may infuse the virtue and the courage to give his judgement according to his impartial sense of things, without any regard to the consequences, in which it may involve him. This constancy of mind may be put to no easy trial in the

present case; when the Judge's determination may perhaps interest his whole future conduct; and when the censure, the scorn, and the displeasure of numbers, and possibly of those whom he has hitherto most considered and esteemed, may be incurred by such determination.

THESE are the great essential qualities which we look for in a JUDGE, and which cannot be dispensed with in a Judge of *Religion*. How far all, or any of these qualities are to be found in those, who take to themselves this office, I have neither time, nor inclination, to consider. For my purpose is not to disparage those who have exercised the right of judging for themselves in the great affair of Religion, nor to discourage any man from doing himself this justice: but simply to represent the difficulties, that lie in our way, and the qualifications we must possess, if we would *judge a righteous judgement*.

I leave it to yourselves, therefore, to apply these observations, as ye think fit. Ye will conclude, however, that to *judge* of the pretentions of your religion is no such easy task, as that any man, without *parts*, without *knowledge*, without *industry*, and without *virtue*, may presume to undertake it.

The sum of all I have said is, then, this. The Apostle, when he became an Advocate for the Gospel, condescended *to speak*, and it must therefore be more especially the duty of its uninspired advocates to *speak as to wise men*; that is, to employ in its defence all the powers of reason and wisdom, of which they are capable. But it will be remembered, too, that much, nay *more*, is required of the JUDGES of it; and that they must approve themselves, not only *wise*, but, in every *moral* sense, excellent men, before they are qualified to pass a final judgement on what such Advocates have to *say* on so momentous a cause, as that of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

# SERMON III.

PREACHED MAY 17, 1767.

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ROM. ii. 14, 15.

*When the Gentiles, which have not the Law,* DO *by Nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves: which shew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their* CONSCIENCE *also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the mean while* ACCUSING *or else* EXCUSING *one another.*

THE scope of this chapter being to assert, that the Gentile, as well as Jew, had a right to be admitted into the Christian church, and

that he was equally entitled to share in the blessings of it, the Apostle grounds his argument upon this Principle, "That, in the final "judgement, there would be no respect of "persons with God; but that Gentiles, as well "as Jews, would be recompensed in that day, "if not in the same degree, yet by the same "rule of proportion, that is, according to their "works."

Whence it would follow, that, if this equal measure was to be dealt to *both*, in the *future judgement*, it could not seem strange if *both* were to be admitted to the *present benefits and privileges* of the Gospel.

But to keep off a conclusion so uneasy to his inveterate prejudices, the Jew would object to this reasoning, "That the Apostle's assump-"tion must be false; for that as God had given "the Heathens no Law, they were not ac-"countable to him: that, as there could be "no room for Punishment, where no Law for-"bade, so there could be no claim to Reward, "where no Law enjoined: and consequently, "that the Heathen world, being left with-"out Law, had no concern in a future recom-"pence, at all."

This suggestion the Apostle obviates, by shewing the inconsequence of it. His answer is to this effect. You, says he, conclude, that the Heathens are not accountable, because they have no Law. But it no way follows, because they had no Law extraordinarily revealed to them from Heaven, that therefore the Heathens had no Law, or Rule of life, at all. For these, *having no* such *Law*, were a *Law unto themselves;* that is, their natural reason and understanding was their Law.

And, for the real existence of such natural Law, he appeals to the virtuous ACTIONS of some Heathens, *who* DO *by nature the things contained in the Law;* who, besides, as it follows in the next verse, *shew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* In which last words are contained two additional arguments in proof of the same point; the *first*, taken from their own CONSCIOUSNESS of such a Law; and the *second, from their reasonings between one another,* ACCUSING *or else* EXCUSING: for this is the strict sense and literal construction of those words in the original, which we improperly

translate — *their thoughts in the mean while accusing or else excusing one another*[n].

So that in the verses of the Text we have a PROPOSITION asserted; and THREE distinct arguments brought in proof of it. The proposition is, *that the Heathen are a Law unto themselves*, or, as it is otherwise expressed, *have a Law written in their hearts*. The arguments in proof of it are, 1. The virtuous lives of some heathen, *doing by nature the work of the Law*: 2. The force of *conscience*, testifying their knowledge of such Law: and, 3. lastly, their *private and judicial reasonings* among themselves, referring to the confessed authority of it.

In conformity to this method of the Apostle, my business will be to open and explain the several arguments in the order, in which they lie; and to confirm, by that means, the truth of his general Proposition, *That there is a natural Law, or Rule of moral action, written in the hearts of men.*

[n] —μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων. See the Paraphrase and Comment on this text by Mr. Taylor of Norwich, to whom I acknowledge myself indebted for the idea which governs the general method of this discourse.

I. The argument from the virtues of the heathen world, in proof of a Law of nature, *written in the hearts of men*, will seem strange to some, who may object, "That, if the appeal be to *action*, it may with greater reason be inferred, there was not any such Law; since the crimes and vices of the heathen world, as terribly set forth by St. Paul himself in the preceding chapter, were far more notorious, than its Virtues. So that if there be any force in St. Paul's appeal to the virtuous lives of some heathen, as evincing a Law, *written in their hearts*, because their practice was governed by it; the like appeal to the vicious lives of many more heathen, should seem with still more force to prove the non-existence of such Law, in as much as it did *not* govern their practice." But the answer is obvious. For a Law may be in part, or even totally, violated by persons under a full conviction of its existence and obligation: whereas it is hard to imagine, that any number of men, of different times, in distant places, and under different circumstances of age, temper, and education, should exhibit in their lives the same tenour of action, without the guidance of some fixed and common Rule.

This then being observed, let us turn our eyes upon the heathen world; on that part,

more especially, which is best known to us from the authentic monuments of Greek and Roman story. For *bad* as that world was, it can ot be denied to have furnished many instances of extraordinary virtue. We find there *justice, temperance, fortitude*, and all those virtues, which their own Moralists called *Offices*, and which the sacred page has dignified with the name of *Graces*, exhibited in their fairest forms, and emulating, as it were, even Christian perfection [o].

But it will be said of *both* these people, what was long since objected by one of them to the other, that their actions were not so illustrious, as is pretended; that we take the accounts of them from their own interested relaters, to whose vanity or genius we are rather to impute the fine portraits, they have given us, of pagan virtue, than to real fact and the undisguised truth of things [p].

Be this allowed. Still there will be ground enough to enforce the Apostle's conclusion. For whence, if not from the source to which he points, could be derived those numerous corresponding instances, though of faint, unfi-

[o] *Nat. Deor.* l. ii. c. 66. [p] Sallust.

nished Virtue? how, but by *nature, did the heathen*, in any degree, *the things of the Law*? and whence, the traces of that conduct in the pagan world, which the Law itself prescribed as *virtuous*?

Or, were the evidence from *facts* ever so suspicious, whence those admired portraits and pictures themselves? or, by what accountable means has it come to pass, that their historians and panegyrists have been able to feign so successfully? In truth, had the pagan world afforded no *one* instance of a virtuous people, I had almost said, no *one* instance of a virtuous character, yet would the projected form of such a people, by one hand [q], and the delineation of such a character, by another [r], have been a certain evidence of some Rule of life and manners, *written in the heart*, if not transcribed into practice; influencing the judgement to approve, if not the will to obey it. But this consideration, perhaps, comes more naturally under the second head of the Apostle's reasoning, which is drawn,

II. *From the force of conscience in the heathen world.*

[q] Plato's *Republic*.
[r] Xenophon's *Inst. of Cyrus*.

To perceive the force of this argument, it must be remembered, That, by conscience, is only meant *a man's judgement concerning the quality of his own actions*; which judgement, however come at, whether by use, or institution, by reason, or instinct, equally supposes some *Law*, or Rule of conduct, by which the nature of each action is tried, and by which its worth is estimated. Now it is of no moment in the present case, from which soever of these sources that judgement is *immediately* drawn, since it cannot but be, that some fixed principle, common to human nature, and of equal extent with it, must have originally given birth to such judgement. For if *use*, or *institution*, be considered as the probable source of it, the question will recur, whence that Use, or what the original of that Institution? A question, which cannot be resolved, unless we conceive some *natural law*, as working at the root, and branching out, as it were, into *Use*, or *Institution*.

Nor is it sufficient to say, *That the manners of different people are, and have been, widely different; and that conscience, or self-judgement, according as different notions or practices prevail, condemns, or approves the very same action.* Without doubt, it does; but the

consequence is not, as some sceptical writers have imagined, that there is no common principle of nature, distinguishing between right and wrong, or that moral action is of absolute indifference; but that men are, and have been, careless and corrupt; that they have either not used the light of nature, or have some way abused it. For it holds of *Sentiment*, as of *Action*, that, though the agreement of numbers in all times and places be a good argument *for* the existence of some common rule of right, as effecting such agreement (because otherwise no tolerable account can be given of it); yet the disagreement even of greater numbers is no proof *against* the existence of such Rule, as we can, without that supposition, give a satisfactory account *of* that disagreement. I call it *a satisfactory account*; for it comes from St. Paul himself, who has taken care to obviate this plausible objection. If it be said then, *That the Heathen approved bad, and condemned good actions*, we own they sometimes did, but answer with the Apostle, That, in such cases, *they became vain in their imaginations*, and that *their foolish heart was darkened*; that, as they *did not search to retain God in their knowledge*, did not exert their faculties to acquire or preserve a right sense of God's nature and will, *he gave them*

*up to an unsearching mind*, suffered them to darken and put out the light of their understandings, and so to *do* [and to *approve*] *things that were not convenient*[s].

This being the true account of the diversity of human judgement, such diversity only proves that the light of nature has been misused, not, that it was never given. Whereas, on the other hand, if the Heathen world can shew us, in general, a conformity of judgement in moral matters, under their state of nature, with that of the world, under the light of Revelation, what follows, but that they, *having not the Law, shew the work of the Law written in their hearts*?

But now that there was, in fact, such a conformity, we conclude from *the accounts of those times, the sense of writers, and the confessions of persons themselves*: the only means, by which a point of this nature can be established. The pagan historians and moralists are full of such lessons, as we now profit by: and even their poets, on the stage itself (where *common* nature is drawn for the sake of

[s] Rom. ch. i. ver. 28—32.—ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα—συνευδοκοῦσι τοῖς πράσσουσι.

*common* instruction) represent their characters, for the most part, as *good* or *bad*, according to the ideas we should now entertain of them. In writers of all sorts, we find abundant evidence of this truth. Numberless persons are upon record, who confess, in their own cases, and attest, this uniform power of conscience. They applaud themselves for, what *we* should call, *a well-spent life*, and they condemn themselves for, what *we* call, *a bad one*. To touch on a topic so known as this, is, in effect, to exhaust it. I shall then but just point to the great [t] *Roman patriot* exulting in the memory of his *Virtues*: and to the [u] *Roman governour*, so famous in sacred writ, whom the preaching of Paul, in concurrence with his own heart, made tremble for his *Vices*.

III. But if men did not feel the power of conscience operating within themselves, and declaring *a Law written in their hearts*, yet their daily conduct towards each other, in the civil concerns of life, would evidently proclaim it. For observe how studious men are to repel an injurious imputation, fastened on a friend; and still more, how they labour to assert their

[t] Cicero, passim.
[u] Felix, Acts xxiv. 25.

own innocence. What pains do we see taken, to overthrow a *false* evidence; and what colours of art do we see employed to palliate or disguise a *true* one! No man needs be told that this is the constant practice of Christians: and *did not the Heathens the same?* Here then is a fresh proof of the point in question; an argument of familiar evidence arising from the transactions of common life. For, in the altercations with each other, in reference to *right* and *wrong*, there is manifestly supposed some prior Law of universal reason, to which the appeal on both sides is directed, and by which the decision is finally to be made. And this, as the Apostle's argument suggests, whichever of the contending parties be in the *wrong*. For the charging another with *wrong* conduct, equally implies a Rule, determining my judgement of moral action; as the defending myself or others from such a charge, evinces my sense of it. Thus, whether I *accuse*, or *answer for myself*, either way, I shew *a law written in my heart*; whence I estimate the *right* or *wrong* of the supposed question. Thus much might be inferred from the ordinary topics of *conversation*: but the case is still clearer, when they come to be debated *in courts of Justice*. More especially, therefore, the strug-

gles and contentions of the *Bar* (for the terms, employed in the text, being *forensic*, direct us chiefly to that interpretation), a series of civil and judiciary pleadings, such as have been preserved to us, from heathen times, in the writings of a Demosthenes, or Cicero, are a standing, unanswerable argument for the existence of a *Rule of Right*, or *Law of natural reason*. For how should these debates be carried on without a Rule, to which the advocates of either party refer? or how should these judicial differences be composed, without a common Law, to arbitrate between them? And what though the Law, referred to, be a *written institute*: It was first *written in the heart*, before legislators transcribed it on brass, or paper.

You see then, the sum of the Apostle's reasoning stands thus. The Heathens, who had no revealed Law, DID *by nature, the things of the Law*: their JUDGEMENT, too, of their own actions, conformed to the judgement of *the Law*: and, lastly, their DEBATES with one another, whether public or private, concerning *right* and *wrong*, evidenced their sense of some Law, which *Nature* had prescribed to them.

And in this fine chain of argument, we may observe the peculiar art, by which it is conducted, and the advantage, resulting from such conduct to the main conclusion. For if the argument from WORKS should seem of less weight (as it possibly might, after the Apostle's own charge upon the heathen world, and in that age of heathen corruption) yet the evidence arising from CONSCIENCE, which was an appeal to every man's own breast, could hardly be resisted: or, if conscience could be laid asleep (as it might be by vice and ill habits) it was impossible they could deny the DEBATES among themselves, or not see the inference that must needs be drawn from them.

It may, further, seem to have been with some propriety that the sacred reasoner employed these topics of argument, in an address to ROMANS: who could not but feel the weight of them the more, as well knowing the ancient VIRTUE of their country; as knowing too, that the Roman people had been famous for their nice sense of right and wrong, or, in other words, a moral CONSCIENCE; and that, as having been a free people, they had been always accustomed to DEBATES about moral action, public and private.

Such is the force, and such the elegant disposition and address, of the Apostle's reasoning. The conclusion follows irresistibly, *That there is a Law written in our hearts, or that, besides a Revealed Law, there is a law of natural reason.*

That this conclusion is not injurious to *revealed Law*, but indeed most friendly and propitious to it; that, in particular, it no way derogates from the honour of the *Christian Law*, nor can serve in any degree to lessen the value, or supersede the use and necessity of it; I shall attempt to shew in another discourse.

# SERMON IV.

PREACHED MAY 24, 1767.

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GAL. iii. 19.

*Wherefore then serveth the Law?*

WHEN the Apostle Paul had proved, in his Epistle to the [a] Romans, that if the *uncircumcision kept the righteousness of the Law, his uncircumcision would be accounted for circumcision;* that is, if the Gentile observed the *moral law,* which was his proper rule of life, he would be accepted of God, as well as the Jew, who observed the *Mosaic Law;* this generous reasoning gave offence, and he was presently asked, WHAT ADVANTAGE THEN HATH THE JEW [b]?

[a] Ch. ii. 26. [b] Ch. iii. 1.

In like manner, when the same Apostle had been contending, in his Epistle to the Galatians, that *the inheritance was not of the Law, but of Promise*[c]; that is, that all men, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, were entitled to the blessings of the Christian covenant, in virtue of God's *promise* to Abraham—*that in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed* — and not the Jews exclusively, in virtue of the *Mosaic Law*, given to them only; the same spirit discovers itself, as before, and he is again interrogated by his captious disciples, WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? if the Gentiles may be justified *through faith in Christ*, and so inherit the promise made to Abraham, as well as the Jews, to what purpose was the Jewish Law then given?

And to these questions, how unreasonable soever, the learned Apostle has himself condescended to give an answer.

Now, the same perverseness, which gave birth to these Jewish prejudices, seems to have operated in some Christians; who, on being told, and even by St. Paul himself, of *a Law of Nature*, by which the Heathen were required to govern their lives, and by the observance of which, without their knowledge of

c Chap. iii.

any revealed Law, they would be finally accepted, have been forward in their turn, to ask, WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? Or, if there be a *natural Law*, according to which the very Heathen will be judged, and may be rewarded, what are the boasted privileges of *Revealed Law*, and, in particular, the revealed Law *of the Gospel?*

Now to this question (having, in my last discourse, asserted the proposition, which gives occasion to it) I shall reply, in the best manner I can, by shewing,

I. That the supposition of a *natural moral Law* is even necessary to the support of REVELATION: And

II. That this supposition no way derogates from the honour of the GOSPEL.

I. *That a natural moral Law is required to support the authority of Revelation*, I conclude, not merely, *because* this supposition is actually made in sacred Scripture, *because* the sacred writers argue expressly from it, and every-where refer to it, but principally and chiefly, *because*, without admitting this prior Law of nature, we cannot judge of any pre-

tended Revelation, whether it be divine or no. For, if there be no such moral Law, previously given, which our hearts and consciences approve, and to which our common nature assents, we can never see the fitness of any means, as conducive to *a moral end*; we can entertain no just and clear notions of *moral action*, properly so called; and, consequently, we can have no ideas of what are called *the moral attributes* of God. Now, in this state of ignorance and uncertainty, how shall any man go about to prove to us the divinity of any Revelation, or through what medium can its truth or authenticity be established? We have no Rule, no principles, by which to judge of the Law, pretending to come from God: we cannot tell, whether it be worthy of him, or not: we do not so much as know, what *worth* or *goodness* is, either in ourselves, or in the Deity. Thus all *internal arguments* for the excellence of any Religion are at once cut off: and yet till, from such considerations, we find that a Religion *may* come from God, we cannot reasonably conclude, on any evidence, that it *does* come from him. The Religion of Mahomet may, for any thing we can tell, if there be no moral Law for us to judge by, be as worthy of God, as that of Jesus. Nor will any *external arguments*, even the most

unquestioned miracles, of themselves, be sufficient to confirm its pretensions. For how shall we know, that these miracles are from God, unless we understand what his attributes are, and whether the occasion, for which they are wrought, be such as is consistent with them?

So that those zealous persons, who think they do honour to the revealed will of God, by denying him to have given a prior natural Law, do, indeed, defeat their own purpose, and put it out of their power to judge of any Revelation whatsoever. There is, then, a Law of Reason, *written in the heart*, by which *every* Religion, claiming to be divine, must be tried; or we have no ground to stand upon in our endeavours to support the credit and divinity of *any* Religion.

What is, then, so necessary to the support of *Revelation*, in general, cannot, we may be sure,

II. *Any way derogate from the honour of the Christian Revelation*, in particular.

But, to put this matter out of all doubt, I shall distinctly shew, that the supposition of a

*natural moral Law* neither discredits the USE; nor tends, in the least, to supersede the NECESSITY, of the Gospel.

And, 1. IT DOES NOT DISCREDIT ITS USE.

For, what, if all men be endowed with those faculties, which, if properly employed, may instruct us in the knowledge of God and ourselves, and of the duties we, respectively, owe to him and to each other? Is it nothing that this knowledge is rendered more easy and familiar to us by the lights of the Gospel? Is it nothing, that those laws, which men of thought and reflexion may deduce for themselves from principles of natural reason, are openly declared to all; that they are confirmed, illustrated, and enforced by express revelation? Is it of no moment, that the plainest and busiest men are as fully instructed in their duty, as men of science and leisure, the simplest as well as the wisest, the mechanic and the sage, the rustic and philosopher? Is it of no use, that men are kept steady in their knowledge and observance of the law of nature, by this pole-star of revelation? that they are secured from error and mistake, from the effects of their own haste, or negligence, or infirmity, from the illusions of custom or ill example, from the false

lights of fanaticism or superstition, and from the perverseness of their own reasonings? Look into the history of mankind, and see what horrid idolatries have overspread the world, in spite of what *Nature* teaches concerning God; and what portentous immoralities have prevailed in the wisest nations, in defiance, nay, *what is worse*, under the countenance and sanction, of what was deemed *natural Reason*.

Add to all this, that the moral duties, we thus easily and certainly know, and without any danger of mistake or corruption, by means of the evangelical Law, are enjoined by the highest authority; are set off by the brightest examples; are recommended to us by new arguments and considerations; are pressed upon us by the most engaging motives, higher and more important than nature could suggest to us; and, lastly, are sublimed and perfected by the most consummate reason.

Still we are not got to the end of our account. Consider, further, our natural weakness, strengthened and assisted by the influences of divine Grace; the doubts and misgivings of Nature, in the momentous points of repentance and forgiveness of sin, cleared;

the true end and destination of moral agents, discovered; a future judgement, ascertained; and the hopes of endless unspeakable glory, which nature could at most but desire, and had no reason (unless that desire be, itself, a reason) to expect, unveiled and fully confirmed to us.

This, and still more, is but a faint sketch of the advantages, which, even in point of morals, we derive from revealed Law. Go now, then, and say, that the light of nature, set up in your own hearts, obscures the glory, or *discredits the use*, of the everlasting Gospel!

2. But it is a low, degrading, and unjust idea of the *Gospel*, to regard it only, as a new code of morals, though more complete in itself, more solemnly enacted, and more efficaciously enforced, than the prior one of *nature*. Were the *use* of each the same, the honour of the Christian revelation would not be impaired, because its NECESSITY IS NOT SUPERSEDED.

For Christianity, rightly understood, is something vastly above what Reason could discover or procure for us. It confirms, incidentally, the law of nature, and appeals to it; it harmonizes, throughout, with that and every

other prior revelation of God's will, as it could not but do, if it were indeed derived from the same eternal source of light and truth. But, for all that, it is no more a simple *re-publication* of the natural, than of any other divine Law. It is a new and distinct revelation, that perfects and completes all the rest. It is the consummation of one great providential scheme, planned before the ages, and fully executed in due time, for the redemptton of mankind from sin and death, through the mercies of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, in this view, which is that which Christianity exhibits of its own purpose, the scheme of the Gospel is not only of the most transcendant *use*, as it confirms, elucidates, and enforces the moral Law, but of the most ABSOLUTE NECESSITY: I say, *of the most absolute necessity*; in reference to the divine wisdom, and to the condition of mankind, both which, without doubt, if we could penetrate so far, required this peculiar interposition of Heaven, on principles of the highest reason, as well as goodness. But the *necessity* is apparent even to us, on the grounds of this very Revelation. For its declared purpose was to rescue all men from the power of *Death*, and to bestow upon them immortal *life* in happiness. But, now,

the same Gospel, that tells us this, tells us, withal, that, *as in Adam all men died, so in* CHRIST, only, *shall all men be made alive;* and that, *without the blood* of CHRIST, *there could be no remission* of the forfeiture incurred by the transgression of Adam. You see, then, that, to argue upon Gospel-principles (and the fair inquirer can argue upon no other) the Christian dispensation was *necessary* to fulfill the purposes of God to man, and to effect that which the divine councils had decreed in relation to him.

The consequence is, that though we admit a Law of nature, and even suppose that Law to have been a sufficient guide in *morals,* yet the honour of Christianity is fully secured, as it's *necessity is not superseded* by the law of nature, which had not *the promise of eternal life,* and could not have it; such promise being reserved to manifest and illustrate the grace of God, through the Gospel.

Reason may be astonished at this representation of things, but finds nothing to oppose to it. It looks up, in silent adoration, to that supreme incomprehensible Power, which wills that which is best, and orders all things with the most perfect reason.

Nor let it be any objection, that the Law of Nature points to some just recompence of moral agents, independently of the Christian Law. Without doubt, it does; and, if the Gospel had never been vouchsafed to man, the judge of all the world would have done that which was fit and right. But can reason, can our own hearts, assure us, that the best of us could stand the scrutiny of strict justice, or be entitled to any recompence of *reward*? Or, if our presumption answer this question in our favour, have we the least pretence to that unspeakable reward, solely made known and promised in the Gospel, *of everlasting life*? Or, if mere Heathens, who are to be judged by their own Law, may be admitted to an ineternal heritance of life and glory, are we sure that this mercy (for mercy it is, and cannot be of right) is not vouchsafed to them, through Christ, though they may have been ignorant of Him? or rather, are we not certain that it must be so, since *eternal life*, on whomsoever bestowed, *is the gift of God through Christ*[d]?

What effect the Gospel-scheme of Redemption through Christ may have on those who lived of old under the Law of nature or any

[d] Rom. vi. 23.

other Law, or who since the coming of Christ have continued in the same circumstances, it becomes us with great caution to enquire, because the Scriptures have not explicitly and fully instructed us in that matter. But, from certain expressions, occasionally dropped by the sacred writers, such as—*that Christ died for all*[e]; *that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*[f]—*that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*[g]; from these, and other passages of the like nature, we are authorised to conclude, that the benefits of Christ's death do extend, in *some sense*, to all men: that, though each will be judged by the Law he lived under, the issue of that judgement will respect the death of Christ: that their living again to receive the recompence of the deeds done in the body, however Nature might suggest this event, is, in fact, brought about through *the redemption that is in Christ*[h]: and that whatever recompence they receive beyond what in strict justice is due unto them, is to be placed entirely and singly to his account. Such inferences, as these, are apparently reasonable, and just: nor

[e] 2 Cor. v. 15.
[f] 2 Cor. v. 19.
[g] 1 John ii. 2.
[h] Rom. iii. 24.

do they prejudice, in any degree, the hope and faith of a Christian: others may have an interest in the blood of the cross; but our privilege is to *know* that we have it. The advantages flowing from this knowledge, are infinite. And therefore good reason there is to hold, with the Apostle, that, although *the living God be the Saviour of all men*, yet is he *specially so of those that believe*[i].

On the whole, then, if men will be putting such a question to us, as that of the text, *Wherefore then serveth the Law?* to what end was the *Christian Law* given, if there be a prior Law of Nature, to which men are responsible, and by which they will be judged? We are now prepared to give them a satisfactory answer.

We say then, *first*, that the *Christian Law*, to whatever ends *it serveth*, presupposes the existence of a *prior natural Law*, by which its pretensions must be tried, and, of course, therefore, its honour is supported.

But, *secondly*, and more directly, we answer, that the supposition of such natural Law

[i] 1 Tim. iv. 10.

no way diminishes *the honour of the Christian Law;* for that it serves to many the most important MORAL USES, over and above those to which the Law of nature serves; and that, further, it is of the most absolute NECESSITY to the accomplishment of its own great purpose, *the redemption of the world,* which the Law of nature could not effect, and which the divine wisdom ordained should only be effected through Christ Jesus. *Lastly,* we reply, that the benefits of the Gospel institution may, must, in some measure, extend to all the sons of Adam, as well as to those who are more especially enlightened by the Christian faith: that all mankind have an interest in the Gospel, though we Christians are first and principally indebted to it.

To conclude, whatever Law, whether we term it of *nature,* or *revelation,* has been given to us, we should receive with all thankfulness and reverence. But, more especially, should we adore the riches of God's grace in the revealed Law of the Gospel, and in the singular unspeakable mercies conveyed by it. Far from envying the Heathen world the advantages they receive from the Law of Reason, under which they live; let us bless God for his impartial over-flowing goodness to all men;

let us even rejoice for the benefits treasured up for them in a merciful dispensation of which, at present, they unhappily know nothing; and let us only acknowledge, with especial gratitude, the higher blessings vouchsafed to us, who are called to *serve God in the Gospel of his Son*[k].

[k] Rom. i. 9.

# SERMON V.

PREACHED MAY 1, 1768.

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HEB. ii. 3.

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

THE Religion of Nature, is the Law of God, speaking by the voice of Reason: the Religion of the Gospel, is the Law of God, speaking by the Revelation of Jesus. Each of these Laws is deservedly called, *a great Salvation*: the *former*, as the basis of all true Religion; the *latter*, as the consummation of all God's religious dispensations to mankind.

Concerning the different purpose and genius of these Laws, I shall not now speak; at least,

no farther, than is necessary to enforce the Apostle's pathetic question, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation;* if we neglect to observe these Laws, respectively given to promote man's truest happiness?

The world abounds in commentaries on the Law of Nature, and on the Law of Christianity. But the misfortune is, that most men regard the study of these Laws, rather as an exercise of the mind, in the way of curious speculation, than as an interesting pursuit, which concerns their moral and religious practice. Which is just the same folly as would be charged on those, who should spend their lives in studying the municipal Laws of their country, with a total unconcern about the observance of them in their own persons.

Indeed the penal sanctions, which attend the violation of those Laws, would presently reclaim the student from this folly, and remind him of the *end*, to which his skill and knowledge in them should be principally directed. And if, in the study of general morals, or of revealed religion, he neglect to refer his speculation to practice, it is only because their penalties are less instant, or less constraining; and not that either the Law of

Nature, or the Law of the Gospel, is without its proper and suitable sanctions.

I. These sanctions, as to *the Law of Nature*, as little as they are sometimes considered, are easily pointed out. For who, that grossly offends against that Law, but is punished with self-contempt; with an anxious dread of that power, which inscribed the law on his heart, and will, some way or other, secure the honour of it; with a sensible diminution of his health, or fortune, or reputation; sometimes, with the decline of his parts and faculties; with many uneasy and embarassing, however unforeseen, situations, into which his vices lead him; with inevitable distresses, experienced in his own person, perhaps entailed on his posterity; in a word, sooner or later, with a disgust of *this* life, and a trembling apprehension of what may befall him in a *future?*

By these penalties, is the LAW OF NATURE enforced: and they are such, as must soon convince a thinking man, indeed every man, that his true interest lies in the observance of that Law. At the same time, it must be owned, that this Law is strict and severe: It punishes with rigour, and rewards sparingly. Disobedience is certain, often intense, misery;

while the most punctual compliance with it secures but a moderate enjoyment of this life, and so much happiness in another (if indeed *any* happiness can be hoped for) as in strict justice may be required.

Yet *this* is the Law, which many, it seems, had rather live and dye under, than accept the benefit of a far BETTER. For,

II. It pleased God, in compassion to his creature, man, not to leave him under this Law; but, by *a special Revelation* of his will, to confer those blessings upon him, which he had no ground in reason to expect, and no means in nature to obtain. Hence, *the free gift of immortality*, on the condition of obeying a certain precept, given to Adam. The *gift* was immense, and the *condition* easy: but, the *latter* not being observed, the *former* was as justly forfeited, as it had been graciously bestowed.

Still, through the exhaustless mercy of the supreme moral Governour, a way was found out, by which unhappy man might be restored to his lost inheritance. He returned again, for the present, under the former yoke of Nature, or, at best, was committed to the tuition

of a rigid *School-master* (for such St. Paul styles the ritual Law of Moses); with some *hopes*, indeed, of a better state, to which he was one day to be advanced; but those, darkly intimated, and imperfectly conceived. The divine purpose, however, was to lead him, by this wholesome discipline, to Christ, to the religion of his Son; who, in due time, vindicated the honour of God's government, by *fulfilling all righteousness;* expiated the foul offence of man's disobedience by his death upon the cross; and reconveyed the inestimable gift of immortal life in happiness, on the new terms of FAITH IN THE DIVINE SAVIOUR, by whose ministry this great work was atchieved. Thus, Jesus became a ransom for the sins of mankind; appearing indeed in our nature at that season which was pre-ordained, but *being slain* (in the divine councils, and therefore the benefit of his death operating) *from the foundations of the world.*

This is a brief account of that great redemption in Christ Jesus, by which we are again restored to those hopes, which had been forfeited by Adam's transgression. In consequence of this dispensation, the reward of obedience is *eternal Life:* not of debt, but of grace, through faith in the Redeemer. But

this is not all. To facilitate and secure that *obedience* (to which so immense a benefit is now annexed) a perfect example of it is set before us in the person of Christ himself; and the holy Spirit is given to the faithful, to purify their hearts and lives, *and to fill them with all joy and peace in believing*[l]. On the other hand, the penalty of *disobedience* (what could it be less?) is a perpetual exclusion from bliss and glory, with such a degree of positive suffering, annexed, as the respective demerits of incorrigible sinners, or the sanctity and wisdom of the divine government, may demand.

Add to all this, that the same scriptures, which open to us the terms of this dispensation, declare, likewise, that no other terms will ever be offered; that we are *complete in Christ*[m]; that all the divine councils, in regard to man, are closed and shut up in *him*; and that no further sacrifice remains for sin, but that every man, henceforth, must stand or fall by the terms of the everlasting Gospel.—*How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

[l] Rom. xv. 13. [m] Col. ii. 10.

III. Still, as I said, there are those, who had rather trust to the Law of Nature, than the Law of Grace; who had rather take their chance of being saved by the rule of their own Reason, than owe their Salvation to the methods prescribed to them by the rule of the Gospel.

Their pretences for this perverse choice, are various: but the true reason, I suppose, is, that the dispensation of the Gospel, though it be unspeakably more benign, more gracious, more encouraging to the good and virtuous, is, at the same time, more awful, more terrifying, to resolved impenitent sinners, than the dispensation of Nature: and they are content to give up their hopes of that immortal prize, which the revelation of Jesus holds out to them, rather than encounter the hazard of that severe sentence, which attends the forfeiture of it.

Be it so then: ye had rather forego the hopes of heaven, than have your minds disquieted with the fear of hell.

But, *first*, do ye not see, that there is something base and abject in this disposition? For what generous man will not aspire to an immense reward, which Heaven, in extreme kind-

ness, may be almost said to force upon him, because there may be danger in coming short of it? "Yes, but the danger is immense, too." Rather say, the loss is immense: the danger of incurring this loss, is not so. For what, indeed, is the danger, when Heaven is your guide, and a crown of glory your hope; when ye have God's word to assure you of the prize, ye contend for; when ye have the holy Spirit of God to assist you in the pursuit; when ye have the Son of God, your all-merciful Saviour himself, to be your Judge, and the dispenser of that prize to you; when, with all these encouragements on the one hand, ye are, besides, quickened by a salutary fear of justice, on the other; and when all that is required of yourselves is, a reasonable faith, a willing mind, and a sincere, though, in many respects, imperfect obedience? Is the danger to be much esteemed, when the helps are so great, when the labour is so small, and the success almost certain? But,

*Secondly,* Consider, also, whether ye do not even prevaricate with yourselves, when ye say, ye had rather take up with a less reward, than run the hazard of so great a punishment. Ye certainly resolve not to contend for any reward at all, not even for the reward of Nature. If

ye did, ye might with more ease, as well as certainty, obtain that of the Gospel. For whether is easier, think ye, to obtain a gift from infinite mercy, or to extort a debt from infinite justice?

But, *Lastly*, the matter is not left to your choice. When God, in his wisdom, had projected a scheme for the salvation of mankind before the ages; when he had prosecuted that scheme by many successive revelations of himself, by many notices and preparatory indications of his good pleasure; when he had separated a chosen family from the rest of the world, to serve as a repository of his councils, and to minister to himself in the execution of them; when he had sent forth his angels to assist in this great work, and had inspired many prophets and holy men to signify, beforehand, the glories of a new kingdom which he meant to establish on earth, and to prepare men for the reception of it; when, after all these preludes of his wisdom and goodness, he came, in due time, to astonish the world with the completion of this adorable scheme, by sending forth his only begotten Son, the express image of his person, to take upon him our nature, to suffer and to die for us; and, by raising up Apostles and Evangelists, under the

guidance of his holy Spirit, to record these amazing transactions; and, by the attestation of stupendous miracles, to spread the knowledge of them over the face of the earth: when this, I say, and more, had been done by the Almighty to usher in his last best dispensation into the world, think not, that all this mighty apparatus was to be thrown away on our caprice or obstinacy; and that, after all, we may be at liberty to reject his whole design, or take as much, or as little of it, as our wayward fancies shall suggest to us. No: assuredly the councils of Heaven will stand firm, whatever attempts we may make, in our wisdom, or weakness, to subvert them. As well may we think to overturn the everlasting mountains, or push the earth itself from its centre, as to defeat or set aside one tittle of that *eternal purpose, which God hath purposed in Christ Jesus* [n]. To whomsoever the sound of the Gospel is come, whether he will hear, or not hear, by that Gospel he must stand or fall: he is, thenceforth, *under the bond of the Covenant*: through faith in Jesus, he inherits the *promises*; or, if he withhold his faith, it is not at his option to have no concern in the *threats* of the Gospel.

n Ephes. iii. 2.

I know what is commonly said to representations of this sort — "That *Faith* depends not on the *will*, but on the *understanding*: that, when the evidence for the truth of any proposition is full and clear, it constrains my assent; when it is otherwise, I reject the proposition, as false, or, at best, suspend my belief of it; and, in either case, as without merit, so without blame: that no Law is obligatory to me, any farther than I see cause to admit the authority of it; and that no pretence of its divine original can subject me to the sanctions of it, unless, on my best inquiry, I allow that claim to be well founded: that, consequently, the Law of Christianity cannot concern him, who is not convinced of its truth; that, where this conviction is not, disbelief must be a matter purely indifferent: and that *He* only is responsible to that Law, who understands it to be his duty to be controuled and governed by it."

This reasoning is plausible; and has many advocates, because it flatters the pride and independency of the human mind. — But, when a Law is promulged with that evidence, which the *divine Legislator* (for of *such* I am now speaking) sees to be sufficient for the conviction of a reasonable man, it is concluding too fast,

to suppose, that I am innocent in rejecting it; or that I am not bound by it, though I do reject it. Error, or unbelief, is only indifferent, when it is perfectly involuntary or invincible; but there is clearly no room for this plea in the present case, when, by the supposition, there is no want of fit evidence.

Even in the case of *human* Laws, my rejection of them may be blameable, though I neither admit the *authority* nor the *equity* of the laws themselves. For there *may* be evidence enough of *both*, if I will but attend to it. Now put the case of a *divine* Legislator; and what was *supposeable*, becomes *certain*. For the attributes of the Deity will permit no doubt, but that, when he gives a Law to man, he will afford such proofs of it, as may, in reason, satisfy those, to whom it is addressed. So that their rejection of it can only proceed from some neglect or wilfulness, on their own part, and not from the want of a sufficient attestation, on the part of the Legislator.

Ye see then, there is no absurdity in supposing the Law of Christianity to oblige those, who do not receive it: for if that Law be of God (and we argue now upon that hypothesis) the evidence for it must be such as is suited to

our faculties; and being addressed, as the tenor of it shews, to all mankind, it binds of course all those to whom that evidence has been submitted.

And this indeed is the very language of that Law itself. For the Jews disbelieved the Gospel, when it was preached to them by our blessed Lord. But what says the Legislator to these unbelievers? Does he leave them to the Law of Nature, whose authority they did not dispute, or to the Law of Moses, which God himself, they knew, had given them? No such thing: he tells them, that very Law, which they rejected, should *judge* them. "He, "that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my "words, hath one that judgeth him: the "WORD, that I have spoken, the same shall "judge him in the last day[o]." And he assigns the reason of this determination—"For I "have not spoken of myself; but the Father, "which sent me, he gave me a commandment, "what I should say, and what I should speak:" that is, the Law, I give you, is of *divine authority*; and therefore not to be rejected without blame on any pretence by you, to

[o] John xii. 48.

whom the knowledge of it, and the proper evidence on which it rests, has been committed.

These reflexions, I know, have small weight with those, who treat the evidences of the Gospel with that scorn, which is familiar to some men. But such persons should, at least, see that their scorn be well founded. If not — but I will only say, they may subject themselves, for aught they know, to the penalties of the Gospel; I mean, to the future judgement of *that man, whom,* in this life, *they would not have to reign over them* [p].

But this remonstrance is properly addressed to those *that are without,* to the contemners of the Christian Law. To YOU, who are within the pale of Christ's Church, and acknowledge his authority; who profess yourselves to be his servants; who admit no other Law, but in subjection to his, and have no expectation of life and glory from any other; to YOU, I say, the question of the text is above measure interesting, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

[p] Luke xix. 14.

Compassion, and prudence, and charity may restrain you from censuring with severity the enemies of the faith; may dispose you to overlook, or to soften at least, the alarming denunciations of the Gospel, in which they are concerned. But for YOURSELVES, who have given your names to Christ, and have hope in him only; who know the wonders of mercy that have been wrought for you, and were finally completed on that cross, which is your trust and consolation, your pride and glory; it is almost needless to say what *your* interest, and what *your* obligation is, to observe, respect, and reverence the dispensation of the Gospel. *Ye* are self-condemned, if ye slight this Law: ye are ungrateful, up to all the possibilities of guilt, if ye make light of it: ye are undone for ever, if *ye neglect so great Salvation.*

What allowances it may please God to make for the prejudices, the passions, the slights, the blasphemies of unthinking and careless men, who have never embraced the faith of Jesus, it may not, perhaps, concern you to inquire. But ye know, that ye are responsible to that Law, which ye profess, and to that master, whom ye serve; that to you, indifference is infidelity; and disobedience, treason;

that wilful unrepented sin in a Christian is without hope, as without excuse, shuts him out from all the rewards, and exposes him, even with his own full consent to all the punishments of the Gospel.

In a word, as their *joy is great in believing*, who obey the Gospel of Christ; so the guilt and the terror is proportionably great, to disobedient believers. For, dreadful as *unbelief* may prove in the issue to such as, through their own fault, have not come to the knowledge of Christ, *Belief*, without obedience, is more dreadful still. I have an apostle's warrant for this assertion. *For it had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us*[q].

q 2 Peter ii. 21.

# SERMON VI.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 16, 1766.

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St. JOHN, xiv. 8.

*Philip saith to him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

OUR Lord, being now about *to depart out of the world*[r], prepares his disciples for this unwelcome event by many consolations and instructions. He acquaints them, more particularly than he had hitherto done, with his own *personal dignity*. He tells them, that, *as they believed in God, they were also to believe in him*[s]; and that, although he should

[r] St. John, xiii. 1. [s] Ch. xiv. 1.

shortly leave them, it was only to remove from Earth to Heaven, to his *Father's house*, where he should more than ever be mindful of their concerns, *and whither I go*, says he, *to prepare a place for you*[t]. And, to impress this *belief* (so necessary for their future support under his *own*, and *their* approaching sufferings) the more strongly upon them, He declares, in the most authoritative manner, *that he*, only, *was the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and that no man could come to the Father, but by him*[u]. Nay, to shew them how great his interest was, and how close his union, with the Father, he even adds, *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from henceforth*, continues he, *ye know him, and have seen him*[x].

This last declaration seemed so strange to his disciples, who had no notion of *seeing the Father* in our Lord's suffering state, or indeed through any other medium, than that of those triumphant honours, which their carnal expectations had destined to him, that one of them, the Apostle *Philip*, *saith to him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us*. As

t St. John, xiv. 2.
u Ch. xiv. 6.
x Ch. xiv. 7.

if he had said, "We know thee to be a person "of great holiness, and have seen many won- "derful things done by thee; so that we can- "not doubt but that thou art a prophet sent "from God, for some great end and purpose "of his providence. But if thy pretensions "go so far as to require us *to believe in Thee*, "*as in the Father*; if we are to conceive "of Thee, as the only *Life* of the world; of "so great authority with God, as to procure "*mansions* in heaven for thy disciples; nay, "of so great dignity in thine own person, as "to challenge the closest *union* and communi- "cation with the eternal Father; if, indeed, "we are to believe such great things of thee, "it is but reasonable, as thou sayest, that, *in* "*knowing and seeing thee, we also know and* "*see the Father*; that we have the clearest "and most unquestioned proofs of thy divinity. "*Shew us*, then, *the Father*; make us see the "glorious symbols of his presence; present us "with *such* irresistible demonstrations of his "power and greatness, as were vouchsafed to "our Fathers, at the giving of the Law; *such*, "as strike conviction on the senses, and over- "rule all doubt and distrust in so high a "matter; *shew us*, I say, *the Father*, in this "sense, *and it sufficeth* to our persuasion and "firm belief in thee."

We see, in this conduct of the Apostle Philip, a natural picture of those inquirers into the truth of our religion; who, because they have not the highest possible evidence given them of it, (at least, not that evidence, which they account the *highest*) are tempted, if not absolutely to reject the faith, yet to entertain it with a great mixture of doubt and suspicion. "If Christianity, say they, were what "it pretends to be, the arguments for it would "be so decisive, that nothing could be op-"posed to them; if it were, indeed, of God, "the proofs of its claim had been such and so "many, that no scepticism could have taken "place, no infidelity, at least, could have kept "its ground, against the force of them."

When this wild fancy comes to take possession of men's minds, the whole tenour of God's dispensations is quarrelled with, and disputed: every circumstance in our Lord's history looks suspicious: and every *fact*, applied to the confirmation of our holy faith, rises into a presumption against it.

*The word of Prophecy* has not been so clear and manifest, as it might have been: *therefore*, the proofs taken from it are of no validity. The miracles of Christ were not so public or so

illustrious as might be conceived: *therefore*, they are no evidence of his divine mission. The *scene* of his birth and actions might have been more conspicuous: *therefore*, the light of the world could not proceed from that quarter. The Gospel itself was not delivered in that *manner*, nor by those *instruments*, which they esteem most fit; its *success* in the world has not been so great, nor its *effects* on the lives of men, so salutary, as might have been expected: *therefore*, it could not be of divine original.

But there is no end of enumerating the instances of this folly. Let me observe, in one word, that the greater part of the objections, which weak or libertine men have opposed to the authority of revealed Religion, are of the same sort with the demand in the text. The authors of them first *imagine* to themselves, what evidence would be the most convincing; and then refuse their *assent* to any other. Their constant language is that of the Apostle Philip — *shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

Now, to see how little force there is in this sort of argumentation, let it be considered, that such high demands of evidence for the

truth of the Christian revelation, are IMPERTINENT, at the best; that they are, most *probably*, on the part of the revealer, IMPROPER to be complied with; that they *must* be, on the part of man, PRESUMPTUOUS, and unwarrantable.

I. All demands of this sort are clearly *impertinent*, and beside the purpose of a fair inquirer into the authority of a divine Religion. For the question is, whether such religion be not accompanied with that *evidence*, which is sufficient to determine the assent of a reasonable man; not, whether it be the highest in its kind, or in its *degree*, which might be imagined. There is an infinite variety, and, as we may say, gradation in the scale of moral evidence, from the highest forms of *demonstration* down to the lowest inducements of *probability*. The impatient mind of man, which loves to rest in assurance, may demand the *former* of these in every case: but the just and sober inquirer, whatever he may wish for, will submit to the *latter*. He takes the argument as presented to him; he weighs the moment of it; and if, on the whole, it preponderates, though but by some scruples of probability, against the inductions on the other side, he is determined by this evidence, with as good reason, though not with as much assurance, as

by demonstration itself. His business, he knows, is to examine whether the conclusion be justly drawn, not whether it be irresistibly forced upon him. It is enough, if the proof be such as *merits* his assent, though it should not *compel* it.

Apply, now, this universal rule of just reasoning to the case of the *Gospel*. Consider it on the footing of that evidence, which it pretends to offer. If this evidence be weak and inconclusive in itself, let it be rejected. But, if it be sufficient to the purpose for which it is given, why look out for any *higher*? The pretensions of Christianity are, indeed, very great. It claims to be received by us, as the *work and word of God*. The proofs of its being such should, no doubt, be adapted to the nature of these pretensions. If, in fact, they be so adapted, all further attestations of its truth, all stronger demonstrations of its divinity (supposing there might be stronger) are, at least, *unnecessary*: our demands of them are without ground, and without reason: that is, they are clearly *not to the purpose* of this inquiry. But

II. The *impertinence* of these demands, is not all. There is good reason to believe, that

they are, in themselves, absolutely unfit and IMPROPER to be complied with.

In saying this, I do not only mean that the *evidence*, such men call for, is so far mistaken as to be really of an inferior sort, and less convincing to a well-informed mind, than that which they reject. This, no doubt, is very frequently the case. It has been shewn in many instances, and even to the conviction of the objector himself, that such circumstances as have been thought most suspicious, such proofs as have appeared the weakest, have upon inquiry turned out, of all others, the strongest and most satisfactory. For example, they who object to the *mean instruments*, by which the Christian Religion was propagated, are confuted by the Apostle Paul himself; who has shewn *that very circumstance* to be the clearest proof of its divinity; this method of publishing the Gospel having been purposely chosen, *that our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*[z]. And the same answer will equally serve to many other pretences of the like nature.

But, as I said, my intention is not, at present, to expose the common mistake of pre-

[z] 1 Cor. ii. 5.

ferring a *weaker* evidence to a *stronger*. Let it be allowed, that the evidence required is, in fact, the *stronger*. Still there is reason to think that *such* evidence was not *proper* to be given. And I argue, *from the nature of the thing; and from the genius of the Gospel.*

1. In *the nature of the thing* it seems not reasonable that a divine revelation should be obtruded upon men by the highest possible evidence. This would be to *constrain* their assent, not to *obtain* it: and the very essence of religion consists in its being a *willing*, as well as *reasonable* service.

Or, take the matter thus. On supposition that it should please God to address himself to man, it is to be presumed he would treat him *as* man; that is, in a way, which is suitable to *the whole of his nature*. But *man* is not only an *intelligent* being, that is, capable of discerning the force of evidence, and of being determined by it; he is, also, a *moral* being, that is, capable of making a right or wrong use of his liberty. Now put the case of an overpowering, irresistible evidence, and his *understanding* is convinced, indeed; but the *will*, that other and better half of his composition, the spring of liberty and of virtue, this, with

all the energies depending upon it, is untouched, and has no share in the operation. On the other hand, let the evidence submitted to him be such only as may satisfy his reason, if attentively, if modestly, if virtuously employed, and you see the whole man in play: his *intellectual* powers are considered, and his *moral* faculties, the faculties of a *wise and understanding heart*, applied to and exerted.

It seems, then, that, if a Revelation were given to man, it would most probably, and according to the best views we can form of the divine conduct, be given in this way; that is, in such a way, as should make it, at once, the proper object of his *faith*, and the test, I had almost said the reward, of his *merit*.

And such, we may observe, is the sense of mankind in other instances of God's government. Who complains, that the ordinary blessings of Heaven, the conveniences and accommodations of life, are not ready furnished and prepared to his hands? Who does not think it sufficient, to our use and to God's glory, that we have the powers requisite to prepare them? Why then expect this greatest of God's blessings, a *divine Revelation*, to be made cheap in being forced upon us, whether we will or no,

by an *evidence*, which silences reason, rather than employs it; and precludes the exercise of the noblest faculties, with which our nature is invested?

2. Thus, *the reason of the thing* affords a presumption (I mean, if men will reason at all on such matters), that these high demands in religion are unfit to be complied with. But we shall argue more safely, in the next place, from *the* GENIUS AND DECLARATIONS OF THE GOSPEL.

From the tenour of the Gospel-revelation we learn, that, though a *reasonable evidence* be afforded of its truth, yet the author and publishers of it were by no means solicitous to force it on the minds of men by an *unnecessary and irresistible evidence*.

We see this in the conduct of our Lord himself, who refused to gratify the curiosity both of friends and foes by needless *explanations*[a], or supernumerary *miracles*[b]. We see it, further, in his general method of speaking

[a] Matt. xxi. 27.—xxii. 46.—xxvii. 14.
[b] Matt. xii. 38.—xvi. 1.

by *Parables*[c]; which are so contrived as to instruct the attentive and willing hearer, but not the prejudiced or indifferent. Nay, when some of his parables were so obscure as that they might seem to require an explanation, he did not always vouchsafe to give it before the people, but reserved the exposition of them for *his disciples, in private*[d]. *To them*, only, *it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*: others, were left to their own interpretation of his *Parables*[e].

This proceeding of Christ plainly shews that he was not anxious to *instruct* or *convince* in that *way*, which might appear the most *direct* and *cogent*. It seems, on the contrary, to have been his choice to afford the strongest proofs of his mission and the clearest views of his doctrine to *those*, not whose incredulity needed his assistance most, but *who*, by their good dispositions and moral qualities, deserved it[f]. He thought not fit *to cast pearls before swine*[g]; and, as contrary as it may be to our forward expectations, it was a rule with him, that *he that hath, to him it should be given*[h].

c Mark iv. 34. d Mark iv. 34.
e Mark iv. 11.
f Matt. xiii. 58. Mark ix. 23.
g Matt. vii. 6. h Mark iv. 25.

That this was the genius of the Gospel, we further learn from the stress, which is laid on *Faith*. It is everywhere demanded as a previous qualification in the aspirants to this religion; it is everywhere spoken of as the highest moral virtue: a representation, strange and impossible to be accounted for, if men were to be borne down by the weight of *evidence* only.

But, to put the matter out of all doubt, we have it declared to us in express words, that those converts are the most acceptable to Christ, who receive his religion, on a reasonable, indeed, but inferiour evidence. When the Apostle Thomas expressed his belief, on the evidence of *sense*, *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*[m].

Now, whatever occasion prophane men may take from this account of Gospel-evidence to calumniate the divine Author of our Faith, as though he relied more on the *credulity*, than the *conviction* of his followers; whatever perverse use, I say, some men may be disposed

[m] John xx. 29.

to make of this circumstance; one thing, I suppose, is clear, "That the genius of the "Gospel does, in fact, discountenance their "*high demands* of evidence." So that, taking the Christian religion for *what it is* (and for *such* only, the rules of good reasoning oblige us to take it) it is very certain that no man is authorized to expect other or stronger proofs of its divinity than have been given. On the contrary, such proofs, as men account stronger, could only serve to weaken its evidence, and overthrow its pretensions.

III. Lastly, Though no *distinct reason* could have been opposed to these high expectations in religion, yet common sense would have seen, "That they are, *in general*, PRESUMPTUOUS "AND UNWARRANTABLE."

For what man, that thinks at all, but must acknowledge that sacred truth, *that God's ways are not as our ways* [n]; and that it is the height of mortal folly to prescribe to the Almighty? *What man is he that can know the council of God? Or, who can think what the will of the Lord is?—Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon the earth, and*

[n] Isaiah lv. 8.

*with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out* [o]?

Such passages as these have, I know, been sometimes brought to insult and disgrace REASON, when employed the most soberly, and in her proper office. But I quote them for no such purpose. I mean not to infer from these testimonies, that we are not competent judges of the evidence which is laid before us (for why, then, was it offered?); but, that reason cannot tell us, *what* evidence it was fit for Heaven to give of its own councils and revelations. We may conjecture, *modestly* conjecture, without blame. Nay the wisest and best men, and even angels themselves, have a reasonable *desire to look into* these things: and their *speculations*, if duly governed, are, no doubt, commendable and useful. But we are not, upon this pretence, to dogmatize on such matters. Much less, may we take upon us to reject a *well-attested* Revelation, a Revelation, that bears many characteristic marks, many illustrious signatures and impresses of divinity, because this or that circumstance, attending it, does not accord to our narrow views and shal-

o Wisdom, ix. 13.

low surmises. In short, men would do well to remember that it is no less a maxim of *reason* than of Scripture, *that the things of God, knoweth no man but the Spirit of God*[r]: a *maxim*, we should never lose sight of, a moment, in our religious inquiries.

But this, though an *important* consideration, is a common one, and I pursue it no farther. Let it suffice to have shewn, "That when, in matters of religion, men indulge themselves in *fancying* what evidence would have been most convincing to them, and then erect such fancies into *expectations*, they are, at best, employed very *idly*:"

"That the worthiest apprehensions, we can frame of the divine wisdom, and both the genius and letter of the Christian religion, discountenance these expectations, as *improper and unreasonable* to be complied with:"

And, "that, from the slightest acquaintance with ourselves, we must needs confess them to be *presumptuous*."

The USE to be made of the whole is, *that men think soberly, as they ought to think*[s]; 

[r] 1 Cor. ii. 11. [s] Rom. xiii. 3.

and that, if ever their restless curiosity, or some worse principle, impells them to make the demand in the text, *shew us the Father*, they repress the rising folly by this just reflexion, that they have no right, in their sense of the word, *to see the Father*.

Not but his infinite goodness hath vouchsafed to unveil himself so far, as is abundantly sufficient to our conviction. But then we must be content to *see him* in that light, in which he has been graciously pleased to *shew* himself, not in that *unapproachable light*[t] in which our madness requires to have him *shewn* to us.

The evidences of Christianity are not dispensed with a penurious hand: but they lie dispersed in a very wide compass. They result from an infinite number of considerations, each of which has its weight, and all together *such* moment, as *may be*, but is not easily resisted. To collect and estimate these, much labour and patience is to be endured; great parts of learning and genius are required; above all, an upright and pure mind is demanded. If, conscious of our little worth or ability, we

[t] Φῶς ἀπρόσιτον. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

find ourselves not equal to this task, let us adore in silence, and with that humility which becomes us. To call out for light, when we have enough to serve our purpose, is indeed *foolish:* but to make this noisy demand, when we have previously blinded our eyes, or have resolved to keep them shut, is something *more* than folly.

After all, there is one way, in which the meanest of us may be indulged in the high privilege of SEEING *the Father*, at least, in the *express image* of his Son. It is, by keeping the commandments. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,* says our Lord himself, *I will love him, and will* MANIFEST *myself to him*[w]. In other words, he will see and acknowledge the *truth* of our divine religion.

[w] John xiv. 22.

# SERMON VII.

## PREACHED IN THE YEAR 1771.

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ST. JAMES, iv. 1.

*From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

INTERPRETERS have observed, that these questions refer to the state of things, which then took place among the Jews, when this epistle was addressed to them. For, about that time, they had grievous *wars and fightings* among themselves; every city, and every family, almost, of this devoted people, not only in Judea, but in many other countries, through

which they were *scattered abroad*, being miserably distracted and torn asunder by civil and domestic factions.

This application, then, of the Apostle's words to the Jews of his own time, seems a just one. But we need look no further for a comment upon them, than to that *hostile* spirit, which too much prevails, at all times, and under all circumstances, even among Christians themselves.

The root of this bitterness, we are told, is in *the lusts, that war in our members:* that is, there is, first, an insurrection of our carnal appetites against the law of our minds; and, then, the contagion spreads over families, neighbourhoods, and societies; over all those, in short, with whom we have any concern, till the whole world, sometimes, becomes a general scene of contention and disorder.

For, ask the princes of this world, what prompts them to disturb the peace of other states, and to involve their subjects in all the horrors of war; and their answer, if they deign to give one, and if it be ingenuous, must, commonly, be, *their lust of conquest and dominion.* Ask the servants of those princes,

what splits them into parties and factions; and they can hardly avoid answering, or we can answer for them, *their lust of wealth and power*. Ask the people, at large, and under whatever denomination, what occasions their contempt of authority, their disobedience to magistrates, their transgressions of law, their cabals and tumults, their hatred, defamation, and persecution of each other; and charity herself, for the most part, can dictate no other reply for them to this question, than that they are excited to all these excesses by *the lust of riot* and misrule, or, of, what they call, LIBERTY.

But there is no end of pursuing this subject in all its applications to particular instances. What we have most reason to lament, is, that Christians not only *fight* with each other, at the instigation of their *lusts*, for their own carnal and corrupt ends; but that they make the very *means*, which God has appointed to compose these differences, the instruments of their animosity, and become outrageous in their hostile treatment of each other, by the perversion of those *principles*, which were intended to be its restraint. For if any thing could appease this tumult among men, what more likely to do it, than the *administration of civil justice*, and the *sacred institutions of*

*religion?* Yet, are even these provisions of divine and human wisdom, for the support of peace and good order, defeated by our restless and ingenious passions; and we contrive, to make RELIGION and LAW themselves, subservient to the increase of that contention, which they tend so naturally to keep out of the world.

As this abuse, which inverts the order of things, and turns the medicine of life into a deadly poison — as this abuse, I say, can never be enough exposed; let me represent to you some part of the evils, which this monstrous misuse of RELIGION and CIVIL JUSTICE has brought upon mankind; as the last, and most striking effort of these malignant *lusts*, from which, according to the holy Apostle, all our violations of peace and charity are derived.

And, FIRST, of the mischiefs, arising from MISAPPLIED RELIGION.

It were an ample field, this, should I undertake to follow the ecclesiastical historian in all the abuses, which he so largely displays. But my design is to *open the fountains;* to point, only, to the *general causes*, from which those abuses have flowed. And the chief of these *causes* will not be overlooked, if we consider

that Christianity has been corrupted by *superstition*, by *policy*, and by *sophistry*: for, in each of these ways, the *lusts* of men have found free scope for their activity; and have produced all those endless discords and animosities, which have dishonoured the Christian world.

1. SUPERSTITION began very early to make cruel inroads into the religion of Jesus: *first*, by debasing its free spirit with the servility of Jewish observances; next, in adulterating its simple genius by the pomp of pagan ceremonies; and, afterwards, through a long course of dark and barbarous ages, in disfiguring its *reasonable service* [m] by every whimsy, which a gloomy or disturbed imagination could suggest.

The *lusts* of men gave birth to these several perversions. The obstinate *pride* of the Jewish Christian was flattered in retaining the abrogated ritual of the Law: the pagan proselyte gratified his *vanity*, and love of splendor in religious ministrations, by dressing out Christianity in all the paint and pageantry of his ancient worship: and the miserable monk soothed his *fears*, or indulged his *spite*, in

m Τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν. Rom. xii. 1.

busying himself with I know not what uncommanded and frivolous expiations, or in torturing others with the rigours of a fruitless penance.

From these rank passions, sprung up *wars* in abundance among Christians. The Apostles themselves could not prevent their followers from *fighting* with each other, in the cause of *circumcision*. The superstition of *days* [a], and of *inages* [b], grew so fierce, that the whole Christian world was, at different times, thrown into convulsions by it. And the dreams of monkery excited every where the most implacable feuds; which had, commonly, no higher object, than the credit of their several *Rules*, or the honour of their *Patron-saints*.

2. When superstition had thus set the world on fire, a godless POLICY struck in, to encrease the combustion.

The Christian religion, which had TRUTH for its object, could not but require an assent from its professors to the doctrines, it revealed; and, having GOD for its author, it, of course,

[a] The dispute about *Easter*, in the second century.
[b] The dispute about *Images*, in the eighth century.

exacted a compliance with the few ritual observances, which he saw fit to ordain. But the wantonness, or weakness, of the human mind, introducing a different interpretation of those *doctrines*, and a different ministration of those *rites*, the policy of princes would not condescend to tolerate such unavoidable differences, but would inforce a rigid uniformity both of sentiment and ceremony, as most conducive, in their ideas, to the quiet and stability of their government.

Again: the honour of prelates and churches seemed to be concerned in all questions concerning place and jurisdiction; and, when these questions arose, was to be maintained by every artifice, which an interested and secular wisdom could contrive.

The *lust* of dominion, was plainly at the bottom of these infernal machinations; and the fruit, it produced, was the most bloody and unrelenting wars, massacres, and persecutions; with which the annals of mankind are polluted and disgraced. But,

3. To work up these two pests of humanity, *superstition*, and *intolerance*, to all the fury,

of which they are capable, unblessed SCIENCE and perverted REASON lent their aid.

For the pride of knowledge begot innumerable portentous heresies: which not only corrupted the divine religion of Jesus (obnoxious to some taint from the impure touch of human reason, because *divine)*, but envenomed the hearts of its professors, against each other, by infusing into them a bitter spirit of altercation and dispute.

In these several ways, then, and from these causes, has our holy religion been abused. The *lusts* of men have turned the Gospel of peace itself into an instrument of *war*: a misadventure, which could not have taken place, had Christians but recollected and practised one single precept of their master — *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls* [e].

But the perversity of man could not be brought to learn this salutary lesson; and so has fulfilled that memorable saying of our Lord, who, foreseeing what abuses would here-

[e] Matt. xi. 29.

after be made of his charitable system, declared of himself — *I came not to send peace, but a sword* [f]. This prediction, at least, the enemies of our faith are ready enough to tell us, has been amply verified, in the event. It has been so: it was therefore inspired, because it was to be fulfilled. But let them remember, withall, that not the genius of the Gospel, but man's incorrigible passions, acting in defiance of it, have given to this prophecy its entire completion.

I come now to represent to you,

II. In the second place, how the *lusts* of men have perverted CIVIL JUSTICE, as well as Religion, into an instrument of contention and hate.

The object of all civil, or municipal laws, is the conservation of private peace, in the equal protection they afford to the property and persons of men. Yet, how often have they been employed to other purposes, *by those, who administer the Laws*; and *by those, for whose sake they are administered!*

[f] Matt. x. 34.

1. In reading the history of mankind, one cannot but observe, with indignation, how frequently the magistrate himself has turned the Law, by which he governs, into an engine of oppression: sometimes, directing it against the liberties of the state; and sometimes, against the private rights of individuals. It were a small matter, perhaps, if he only took advantage of a *severe* law, or drew over an *ambiguous* one, to countenance his iniquitous purposes. But how oft has he embittered the mildest, or tortured the plainest laws, by malignant glosses and strained interpretations! gratifying, in both ways, his revenge, his avarice, or his ambition; yet still in the forms of Law, and under the mantle, as it were of public justice!

Such abuses there *have* been in most states, and, it may be, in our own. God forbid, that, standing in this place, I should *accept the persons of men, or give flattering titles unto any* [n]. But truth obliges me to say, that there is, now, no colour for these complaints. The administration of justice, on the part of the *Magistrate*, is so pure, as to be the glory of

[n] Job xxxii. 21.

the age, in which we live. The abuses all arise from another quarter; and the contentious spirit is kept alive and propagated by the lusts of private men. And what renders their iniquity without excuse, is, that the very equity of those forms, in which our laws are administered, is made the occasion of introducing all these corruptions.

2. To come to a *detail* on this subject, might be thought improper. Let me paint to you, then, in very *general* terms, the disorders that spring from this perversion of Law; and, to do it with advantage, let me employ the expressive words of an ancient Pagan writer.

The Roman governors of provinces, it is well known, had their times for the more solemn administration of civil justice. Suppose, then, one of these governors to have fixed his residence in the capital of an Asiatic province, to have appointed a day for this solemnity, and, with his Lictors, and other ensigns of authority about him, to be now seated in the forum, or public place of the city; and consider, if the following representation of an indifferent by-stander be not natural and instructive.

"See," says the eloquent writer[a], whose words I only translate, "see that vast and "mixt multitude assembled together before "you. You ask, what has occasioned this "mighty concourse of people. Are they met "to sacrifice to their country Gods, and to "communicate with each other in the sacred "offices of their religion? Are they going "to offer the Lydian first-fruits to the Ascræan "Jupiter? or, are they assembled in such "numbers to celebrate the rites of Bacchus, "with the usual festivity? Alas, no. Neither "pious gratitude, nor festal joy, inspires "them. *One* fierce unfriendly passion *only* "prevails; whose epidemic rage has stirred up "all Asia, and, as returning with redoubled "force on this stated anniversary, has driven "these frantic crouds to the forum; where "they are going to engage in law-suits with "each other, before the Judges. An infinite "number of causes, like so many confluent "streams, rush together, in one common tide, "to the same tribunal. The passions of the "contending parties are all on fire; and the

[a] Plutarch, or whoever was the author of a fragment, printed among his moral discourses, and entitled, πότερον τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ τὰ τοῦ σώματος πάθη χείρονα. Par. Ed. vol. ii. p. 500.

"end of this curious conflict is, the ruin of "themselves and others. What fevers, what "calentures, what adust temperament of the "body, or overflow of its vicious humours, is "to be compared to this plague of the dis-"tempered mind? Were you to interrogate "each cause (in the manner you examine a "witness) as it appears before this tribunal, "and ask, WHENCE IT CAME? the answer "would be, an obstinate and self-willed spirit "produced *this*; a bitter rage of contention, "*that*; and a lust of revenge and injustice, "*another*."

It is not to be doubted, that this rage of the contending parties was inflamed, in those times, by mercenary agents and venal orators; by men, who employed every fetch of cunning, and every artifice of chicane, to perplex the clearest laws, to retard the decision of the plainest cases, and to elude the sentence of the ablest judges. Without some such management as this, the passions of the litigants could not have been kept up in such heat and fury, but must gradually have cooled, and died away of themselves. Add this, then, to the other features, so well delineated, and you will have the picture of *ancient litigation* complete.

And what think we, now, of this picture? Is there truth and nature in it? Are we at all concerned in this representation; and do we discover any resemblance to it in what is passing elsewhere, I mean in modern times, and even in Christian societies? If we do, let us acknowledge with honesty, but indeed with double shame, that, like the Pagans of old, we have the art to pervert the best things to the worst purposes; and that the *lusts* of men are still predominant over the wisest and most beneficent institutions of civil justice.

Indeed, as to ourselves, the mild and equitable spirit of our laws might be enough, one would think, to inspire another temper: but when we further consider the divine spirit of the Gospel, by which we pretend to be governed, and the end of which is *charity*, our prodigious abuse of *both* must needs cover us with confusion.

The instruction, then, from what has been said, is this: That, since, as St. James observes, all our *wars and fightings* with each other proceed only from our *lusts*, and since *these* have even prevailed to that degree as to corrupt the two best gifts, which God, in his mercy, ever bestowed on mankind, that is, to

make *Religion* and *Law* subservient to our bitter animosities; since all this, I say, has been made appear in the preceding comment on the sacred text, it becomes us, severally, to consider what our part has been in the disordered scene, now set before us: what care we have taken to check those unruly passions, which are so apt, by indulgence, to tyrannize over us; and, if this care has been less than it ought to have been, what may be the consequence of our neglect. We should, in a word, *take heed, how we bite and devour one another;* not only, as the Apostle admonishes, *that we be not consumed one of another;* but lest, in the end, we incur the chastisement of that LAW, we have so industriously perverted, and the still sorer chastisement of that RELIGION, we have so impiously abused.

# SERMON VIII.

PREACHED APRIL 29, 1770.

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1 TIM. i. 5.

*The end of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

THE Apostle, in the preceding verse, had warned Timothy against *giving heed to fables and endless genealogies:* by FABLES, meaning certain Jewish fictions and traditions applied to the explication of theological questions, and not unlike the tales of the pagan mythologists, contrived by them to cover the monstrous stories of their Gods; and, by GENEALOGIES, the derivation of Angelic and Spiritual na-

tures[q], according to a fantastic system, invented by the Oriental philosophers, and thence adopted by some of the Grecian Sects. These *fables and genealogies* (by which the Jewish and Pagan converts to Christianity had much adulterated the faith of the Gospel) the Apostle sets himself to expose and reprobate, as producing nothing but curious and fruitless disputations; being indeed, as he calls them, *endless*, or interminable[r]; because, having no foundation in the revealed word of God, they were drawn out, varied, and multiplied at pleasure by those, who delighted in such fanatical visions.

Then follows the text.—*The end of the Commandment, is* CHARITY: *out of a* PURE HEART: *and of a* GOOD CONSCIENCE; *and of* FAITH UNFEIGNED—As if the Apostle had said, "I have cautioned you against this pernicious folly: but, if ye must needs deal in the way of Mythology and Genealogy, I will tell you how ye may employ your ingenuity to more advantage. Take Christian *Charity*, for your theme: *mythologize* that capital Grace of your profession; or, deduce the *parentage* of it, according to the steps, which I will point out

q Called *Æones*. See Grotius in loc.

r Ἀπεράντοις.

to you. For it springs immediately out of *a pure heart*; which, itself, is derived from *a good conscience*; as that, again, is the genuine offspring or emanation of *faith unfeigned*. In this way, ye may gratify your mythologic or genealogical vein, innocently and usefully[s]; for ye may learn yourselves, and teach others, how to acquire and perfect that character, which is the great object of your religion, and *the end of the Commandment*."

Let us, then, if you please, attend to this genealogical deduction of the learned Apostle; and see, if the descent of Christian charity be not truly and properly investigated by him.

I. CHARITY, says he, is *out of a pure heart*: that is, it proceeds from a heart, free from the habits of sin, and unpolluted by corrupt affections.

To see with what propriety, the Apostle makes a pure heart the *parent* of charity, we are to reflect, that this benevolent temper, which inclines us to wish and do well to others, is the proper growth and produce, indeed, of the human mind, but of the human mind in its

[s] Dat nobis et Paulus brevem γενεαλογίαν, sed perutilem. GROTIUS.

native and original integrity. To provide effectually for the maintenance of the social virtues, it hath pleased God to implant in man, not only the power of reason, which enables him to see the connexion between his own happiness and that of others, but also certain instincts and propensities, which make him *feel* it, and, without reflexion, incline him to take part in foreign interests. For, among the other wonders of our make, this is *one*, that we are so formed as, whether we will or no, *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep*[t]. But now this sympathetic tenderness, which nature hath put into our hearts for the concerns of each other, may be much impaired by habitual neglect, or selfish gratifications. If, instead of listening to those calls of nature, which, on the entrance into life, are incessantly, but gently, urging us to acts of generosity, we turn a deaf ear to them, and, charmed by the suggestions of self-love, yield up ourselves to the dominion of the grosser appetite, it cannot be but that the love of others, however natural to us, must decline, and become, at length, a feeble motive to action; or, which amounts to the same thing, be constantly overpowered by the undue prevalence

[t] Rom. xii. 15.

of other principles. Thus we may see, how ambition, avarice, sensuality, or any other of the more selfish passions, tends directly, by indulgence, to obstruct the growth of *charity*; and how favourable an uncorrupt mind is to the production and maturity of this divine virtue.

But, further, the impurities of the heart do not only hinder the exertions of *benevolence*; they have even a worse effect, they cause us to pervert and misapply it. It is not, perhaps, so easy a matter, as some imagine, to divest ourselves of all attachment to the interest of our fellow-creatures. But, by a long misuse of our faculties, we may come in time to mistake the objects of *true* interest; and so be carried, by the motives of benevolence itself, to do irreparable mischief to those we would most befriend and oblige. This seems to be the case of those most abandoned of all sinners, who take pains to corrupt others, and not only do wicked things themselves, *but have pleasure in those who do them*[u]. All that can be said for these unhappy victims of their own lusts, is, that their *perverted benevolence* prompts them to encourage others in that course of life, from which, if it were

[u] Rom. i. 32.

rightly exercised, they would endeavour, with all their power, to divert them.

So necessary it is, that charity should be out of *a pure heart!* It is polluted in its very birth, unless it proceed from an honest mind: it is spurious and illegitimate, if it be not so descended.

II. The next step in this line of moral ancestry, is a GOOD CONSCIENCE: which phrase is not to be taken here in the negative sense, and as equivalent only to a *pure heart;* but as expressing a further, a *positive* degree of goodness. For so we find it explained elsewhere; *having*, says St. Peter, a GOOD CONSCIENCE, *that whereas they speak evil of you, as* EVIL DOERS, *they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your* GOOD CONVERSATION *in Christ Jesus: for it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for* WELL DOING, *than for evil doing* [x]. Whence, by *a good conscience*, we are authorized to understand a mind, *conscious to itself of beneficent actions.* And thus the Apostle's intention will be, to insinuate to us, that, to be free from *depraved affections*, we must be actively virtuous; and that we must be *zealous*

[x] 1 Peter iii. 16.

in good works, if we would attain to that *purity* of heart, which is proper to beget the genuine virtue of Christian charity.

For, we may conceive of the matter, thus. A *good conscience*, or a mind enured to right action, is most likely, and best enabled, to shake off all corrupt partialities; and, as being intent on the strenuous exercise of its duty, in particular instances, to acquire, in the end, that tone of virtue, which strengthens, at once, and refines the affections, till they expand themselves into an universal good-will. Thus we see that, without this moral discipline, we should scarce possess, or not long retain, a *pure heart*; and that the heart, *if pure*, would yet be inert and sluggish, and unapt to entertain that prompt and ready benevolence, which true charity implies.

So that an active practical virtue, as serving both to purify and invigorate the kind affections, has deservedly a place given to it in this lineal descent of Christian love. But,

III. The Apostle rises higher yet in this genealogical scale of charity, and acquaints us that a *good conscience*, or a course of active positive virtue, is not properly and lawfully de-

scended, unless it proceed from a FAITH UNFEIGNED, that is, a sincere undissembled belief of the Christian religion.

And the reason is plain. For there is no dependance on virtuous practice; we cannot expect that it should either be steady, or lasting, unless the principle, from which it flows, be something nobler and more efficacious, than considerations taken from the beauty, propriety, and usefulness of virtue itself. Our active powers have need to be sustained and strengthened by energies of a higher kind, than those which mere philosophy supplies. We shall neither be able to bear up against the difficulties of a good life, nor to stand out against the temptations, which an evil world is always ready to throw in our way, but by placing a firm trust on the promises of God, and by keeping our minds fixed on the glorious hopes and assurances of the Gospel. And *experience* may satisfy us, that practical virtue has no stability or consistency, without these supports.

Besides, considering a *good conscience*, or a moral practical conduct, with an eye to its influence on a *pure heart*, till it issue in complete *charity*, we cannot but see how the Christian

faith is calculated to direct its progress, and secure the great end proposed. For the whole system of our divine religion, which hath its foundation in *grace;* its *precepts,* which breathe nothing but love and amity; its *doctrines,* which only present to us, under different views, the transcendant goodness of God in the great work of redemption; its *history,* which records the most engaging instances of active benevolence; all this cannot but exceedingly inspirit our affections, and carry them out in a vigorous and uniform prosecution of the subordinate *means,* which are to produce that last perfection of our nature, a pure and permanent love of mankind. For at every step we cannot but see the *end of the commandment,* so perpetually held out to us, and derive a fresh inducement from *faith,* to accomplish and obtain it.

Indeed, to produce this effect, our *faith,* as the Apostle adds, must be UNFEIGNED: that is, it must be nourished and intimately rooted in the heart; we must not only yield a general assent to the sacred truths of our religion, we must embrace them with earnestness and zeal, we must rely upon them with an unshaken confidence and resolution. But all this will be no difficulty to those who derive their *faith*

from its proper source, that is, who make a diligent study of the holy scriptures: where *only* we learn what the *true* faith (which will ever be most friendly to virtue) is; and whence we shall *best* derive those motives and considerations, which are proper to excite and fortify this principle in us.

And thus, that Charity, which a *pure mind* gives the liberty of exerting, and which a *good conscience* manifests and at the same time improves, will, further, be so sublimed and perfected by the influence of divine *faith*, as will render it the sovereign guide of life, and the pride and ornament of humanity.

Or, to place the descent of Charity, in its true and natural order, it must spring, first, from an *unfeigned faith* in the Gospel of Jesus; that faith must then produce, and shew itself in, a *good conscience:* and that conscience must be thoroughly purged from all selfish and disorderly *affections:* whence, lastly, the celestial offspring of *Charity* has its birth, and comes forth in all the purity and integrity of its nature.

FROM THIS lineage of Christian Charity, thus deduced, many instructive lessons may be

drawn. We may learn to distinguish the true and genuine, from pretended Charity: we have, hence, the surest way of discerning the spirits of other men, and of trying our own: we may correct some popular mistakes concerning the virtue of charity; and shall best comprehend the force and significancy of the several commendations, which the inspired writers, in many places, and in very general terms, bestow upon it.

Let me conclude this discourse with an instance of such instruction, respecting each of those heads, which the order of the text hath afforded the opportunity of considering.

And, *first*, from the necessity of a PURE HEART, we are instructed what to think of the benevolence of those men, who, though enslaved to their own selfish passions, are seldom the most backward to make large pretences to this virtue. But, be their pretences what they will, we know with certainty, that, if the heart be impure, its charity must be defective. It must, of course, be weak and partial; confined in its views, and languid in its operations; in a word, a faint and powerless quality, and not that generous, diffusive, universal principle, which alone deserves the exalted name of *Charity*.

We conclude, also, on the same grounds, that the hatred of vice is no breach of Christian charity. This charity is required to flow from a *pure heart*. But there is not in nature a stronger antipathy, than between *purity*, and *impurity*. So that we might as well expect light and darkness, heat and cold, to associate, as spotless virtue not to take offence at its opposite. I know, indeed, that the hatred due to the vices of men, is too easily transferred to their persons. But that charity, which is lineally descended from *faith*, will see to make a difference between them; and while it feels a quick resentment against *sin*, will conceive, nay will, by that very resentment, demonstrate, a tender concern for *sinners*, for whom Christ died.

*Secondly*, from the rank, which a GOOD CONSCIENCE holds in this family of love, we are admonished to avoid the mistake of those, who are inclined to rest in negative virtue, as the *end of the commandment*; and who account their charity full and complete, when it keeps them only from intending, or doing mischief to others. The Apostle, on the contrary, gives us to understand, that its descent is irregular, if it be not allied to active positive virtue; such as takes a pleasure in kind offices, is zealous

to promote the welfare of others, and is fertile in *good works*. And this conclusion is the more necessary to be inforced upon us, since, in a world like this, where vice is sure to be active enough, the interests of society will not permit that Charity should be idle.

Lastly, from the lineal descent of Charity from FAITH, we must needs infer, that infidelity is not a matter of that indifference to social life, which many careless persons suppose it to be. It is the glory of our faith, that it terminates in charity. Every article of our creed is a fresh incitement to good works: in so much that, he who understands his religion most perfectly, and is most firmly persuaded of it, can scarce fail of approving himself the best man, as well as the best *Christian*. And this, again, is a consideration, which should affect all those who profess to have any concern for the interests of society and moral virtue.

Thus it appears, how instructive the doctrine of the text is, and how usefully, as well as elegantly, the Apostle sets before us, in this short genealogical table, the proper ancestry of Charity: in which *Faith*, as the ultimate progenitor, begets an *active virtue*; and that,

impregnating the *heart* with pure affections, produces at length this divine offspring of *Christian love.*

If we had found this mythological fiction in Xenophon or Plato, we should have much admired the instruction conveyed in it. Let it not abate our reverence for this moral lesson, that it comes from an Apostle of Jesus, and, if not dressed out in the charms of human eloquence, has all the authority of truth and divine inspiration to recommend it to us.

# SERMON IX.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 9, 1766.

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ROM. xii. 10.

—*In honour preferring one another.*

IT is much to the honour of the inspired writers, because it shews them to be no enthusiasts, that, with all their zeal for the revealed doctrines of the Gospel, they never forget or overlook the common duties of *humanity*; those duties, which Reason itself, a prior Revelation, had made known to the wiser part of mankind.

Nay, which is more remarkable, they sometimes condescend to enforce what are called the

*lesser moralities*[a]; that is, those inferiour duties, which, not being of absolute necessity to the support of human society, are frequently overlooked by other moralists, and yet, as contributing very much to the comfortable enjoyment of it, are of *real* moment, and deserve a suitable regard.

The text is an instance of this sort—*in honour preferring one another*—the NATURE, and GROUND, and right APPLICATION, of which duty, it is my present purpose to explain.

1. The general NATURE of this virtue consists in a disposition to express our good will to others by exteriour testimonies of respect; to consult the credit and honour of those we converse with, though at some expence of our own vanity and self-love. It implies a readiness to prevent them in the customary decencies of conversation; a facility to give way to their reasonable pretensions, and even to abate something of our own just rights. It requires us to suppress our petulant claims of superiority; to decline all frivolous contests and petty rivalries; to moderate our own demands of pre-

[a] *Les petites morales;* as the French moralists call them.

eminence and priority; and, in a word, to please others, rather than ourselves.

It is an easy, social, conciliating virtue; a virtue made up of *humility* and *benevolence*, the *former*, inclining us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought; and the *latter*, to give our Christian brother an innocent satisfaction when we can.

And our obligation to the practice of this virtue is FOUNDED,

II. On the clearest reasons, taken both from the *nature of man*, and the *genius of our holy Religion*.

And, FIRST, from *the nature of man*.

Among the various principles, some of them, in appearance, discordant and contradictory, which constitute our common nature, one of the first to take our attention is, "A conscious sense of dignity;" an opinion of self-consequence, which mixes itself with all our thoughts and deliberations; prompting us to entertain lofty sentiments of our own worth, and aspiring to something like superiority and dominion over other men. This principle, which

appears very early, and is strongest in the more generous dispositions, is highly necessary to a being formed for virtuous action; and naturally leads to the exertion of such qualities as are proper to benefit society, as well as to gain that ascendency in it, to which we pretend. It is the spring, indeed, of every commendable emulation; puts in act all our better and nobler faculties; and gives nerves to that labour and industry, by which every worthy accomplishment is attained.

But now this principle (so natural and useful), when it is not checked by others, but is suffered to take the lead and predominate on all occasions, undisciplined and uncontrolled, easily grows into a very offensive and hurtful quality: *offensive*, because it is now exerted to the humiliation of every other, who is actuated by the same principle; and *hurtful*, because, in this undue degree, it counteracts the very purpose, *the good of human society*, for which it was designed.

This quality we know by the name of PRIDE. The other moderate degree of self-esteem, which is allowable and virtuous, seems not (I suppose, from its rare appearance under that form) to have acquired in our language a distinct name.

To *Pride*, then, the pernicious and too common issue of self-love, it became necessary, that some other principle should be opposed. And such a principle, as is proper to correct the malignity of pride, we find in that *philanthropy*, which, by an instinct of the same common nature, disposeth us to consult the happiness, and to conciliate to ourselves the good will and affection, of mankind. This benevolent movement of the mind is, further, quickened by the mutual interest all men have in the exercise of it. For Pride is disarmed by submission; and, by receding from our own pretensions, we take the most likely way to moderate those of other men. Thus, the generous affections are kept in play; reciprocal civilities are maintained; and, by the habit of *each preferring other*, which prudence would advise, if instinct did not inspire, the peace of society is preserved, its joy encreased, and even our vanity, so far as it is a just and natural affection, gratified and indulged.

The reason of the Apostolic precept is, then, laid deep in the constitution of human nature; which is so wonderfully formed, that its *perfection* requires the reconciliation of contrary qualities; and its *happiness* results from making benevolence itself subservient to self-love.

2. If, from the philosophic consideration of man, we turn to the *genius of the Gospel*, we shall there find this conclusion of natural reason strengthened and confirmed by evangelical motives.

Benevolence, which, in the Gospel, takes the name of *Charity*, hath a larger range in this new dispensation, than in that of nature. The doctrine, and still more the example, of Jesus, extends the duty of humility and self-denial; requires us to make ampler sacrifices of self-love, and to give higher demonstrations of good-will to others, than mere reason could well demand or enforce. He, that was so far from *seeking his own*, that he *emptied himself of all his glory*, and stooped from heaven to earth, for the sake of man, hath a right to expect, from his followers, a more than ordinary effort to conform to so divine a precedent, a peculiar attention to the mutual benefits and concerns of each other. It is but little that we keep within some decent bounds our aspiring tempers and inclinations: we are now to *subject* ourselves to our Christian brethren; to renounce even our innocent and lawful pretensions; and to forego every natural gratification, when the purposes of Christian Charity call us to this arduous task.

For the Gospel, it is to be observed, has taken us out of the loose and general relation of men, and has bound us together in the closer and more endearing tie of *Brethren*: it exalts the good-will, we were obliged to bear to the species, into the affection, which consanguinity inspires for the individuals of a private family. The Apostle, therefore, in the words preceding the text, bids us—*be kindly affectioned one to another with* BROTHERLY LOVE—not, with the *love*, that unites one *man* with another[c], which is the highest pretension of mere morality; but with the *love*, that knits together natural *brethren*[d], which is the proper boast and character of evangelical love. The words of the original have a peculiar energy[e]. They express that instinctive warmth of affection, which nature puts into our hearts for our nearest kindred, such as communicate with us by the participation of one common blood.

So that the same compliances, we should make with *their* inclinations, the same preference, we should give to *their* humour and interest above our own, should now be extended

c Φιλανθρωπία. d Φιλαδελφία.
e Τῇ φιλ. εἰς αλλ. ΦΙΛΟΣΤΟΡΓΟΙ.

and exercised towards all Christians; and that principle of an ardent affection, by which we are led to make the most chearful condescensions to our *natural* brother, should work in us the same generous consideration of our *spiritual* brother, *for whom Christ died.*

Having explained the *nature* of this duty, and the *grounds*, both in reason and religion, on which it rests, it now remains,

III. To provide for the RIGHT APPLICATION of it in practice. And here, in truth, the whole difficulty lies.

It is evident enough, I suppose, from what has been said, That the moral and Christian duty of *preferring one another in honour*, respects only social peace and charity, and terminates in the good and edification of our Christian brother. Its use is, to soften the minds of men, and to draw them from that savage rusticity, which engenders many vices, and discredits the virtues themselves. But when men had experienced the benefit of this complying temper, and further saw the ends, not of charity only, but of SELF-INTEREST, that might be answered by it; they considered no

longer its just purpose and application, but stretched it to that officious sedulity, and extreme servility of adulation, which we too often observe and lament in polished life.

Hence, that infinite attention and consideration, which is so rigidly exacted, and so duly paid, in the commerce of the world: hence, that prostitution of mind, which leaves a man no will, no sentiment, no principle, no character; all which disappear under the uniform exhibition of good-manners: hence, those insidious arts, those studied disguises, those obsequious flatteries, nay, those affected freedoms, in a word, those multiplied and nicely-varied forms of insinuation and address; the direct aim of which may be to acquire the fame of politeness and good-breeding; but the certain effect, to corrupt every virtue, to sooth every vanity, and to inflame every vice, of the human heart.

These fatal mischiefs introduce themselves under the pretence and semblance of that *humanity*, which the text encourages and enjoins. But the *genuine* virtue is easily distinguished from the *counterfeit*, and by the following plain *signs*.

1. TRUE POLITENESS is modest, unpretending, and generous. It appears as little as may be; and, when it does a courtesy, would willingly conceal it. It chuses silently to forego its own claims, not officiously to withdraw them. It engages a man to *prefer his neighbour to himself*, because he really esteems him; because he is tender of his reputation; because he thinks it more manly, more Christian, to descend a little himself, than to degrade another — It respects, in a word, the *credit and estimation* of his neighbour.

The mimic of this amiable virtue, FALSE POLITENESS, is, on the other hand, ambitious, servile, timorous. It affects popularity; is sollicitous to please, and to be taken notice of. The man of this character does not offer, but obtrude, his civilities: *because* he would merit by this assiduity; because, in despair of winning regard by any worthier qualities, he would be sure to make the most of this; and, lastly, because of all things he would dread, by the omission of any punctilious observance, to give offence.— In a word, this sort of politeness respects, for its immediate object, the *favour and consideration* of our neighbour.

2. Again: the man, who governs himself by the *spirit* of the Apostle's precept, expresses his *preference of another* in such a way as is worthy of himself: in all innocent compliances, in all honest civilities, in all decent and manly condescensions.

On the contrary, the man of the world, who rests in the *letter* of this command, is regardless of the *means*, by which he conducts himself. He respects neither his own dignity, nor that of human nature. Truth, reason, virtue, all are equally betrayed by this supple impostor. He assents to the errors, though the most pernicious; he applauds the follies, though the most ridiculous; he sooths the vices, though the most flagrant, of other men. He never contradicts, though in the softest form of insinuation; he never disapproves, though by a respectful silence; he never condemns, though it be only by a good example. In short, he is sollicitous for nothing, but by some studied devices to hide from others, and, if possible, to palliate to himself, the grossness of his illiberal adulation.

3. Lastly, we may be sure, that the *ultimate* ENDS, for which these different *objects* are pursued, and by so different *means*, must also lie wide of each other.

Accordingly, the truly polite man would, by all proper testimonies of respect, promote the credit and estimation of his neighbour, *because* he sees, that, by this generous consideration of each other, the peace of the world is in a good degree preserved; *because* he knows that these mutual attentions prevent animosities, soften the fierceness of men's manners, and dispose them to all the offices of benevolence and charity; *because*, in a word, the interests of society are best served by this conduct; and *because* he understands it to be his duty, *to love his neighbour*.

The falsely polite, on the contrary, are anxious, by all means whatever, to procure the favour and consideration of those they converse with, *because* they regard ultimately nothing more than their private interest; *because* they perceive, that their own selfish designs are best carried on by such practices: in a word, *because* they *love themselves*.

Thus we see, the genuine virtue consults the honour of others by worthy means, and for the noblest purpose; the counterfeit, sollicits their favour by dishonest compliances, and for the basest end.

By such evident marks are these two characters distinguished from each other! and so impossible it is, without a wilful perversion of our faculties, to mistake in the application of the Apostle's precept!

It follows, you see, from what has been said, "that integrity of heart, as Solomon long "since observed, is the best guide in morals[f]." We may impose upon others by a shew of civility; but the deception goes no farther. We cannot help knowing, in our own case, if we be ingenuous, when this virtue retains its nature, and when it degenerates into the vice that usurps its name. To conclude, an honest man runs no risk in being polite. Let us only *respect* ourselves; and we shall rarely do amiss, when, as the Apostle advises, *in honour we prefer one another*.

[f] *The integrity of the upright shall guide them.* Prov. xi. 3.

# SERMON X.

PREACHED MAY 6, 1770.

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JOHN xiii. 8.

—*Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*

TO comprehend the full meaning of these words (which, as we shall see, are of no small importance) we must carefully attend to the circumstances of the history, which gave occasion to them.

The chapter begins thus—*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out*

*of this world to the Father, having loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them to the end.*—

We are prepared by these words to expect something, on the part of our Lord, very expressive of his love for his Disciples.

The *season*, too, is critical, and must excite our attention: *it was before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world to the Father*; in other words, just before his crucifixion.

There is, indeed, some difficulty in fixing the precise time, when the transaction, now to be related, happened. I take no part in the disquisition, because it is not material to my purpose, and would divert me too much from it. It is enough to say, that it was, at most, but the evening before the Paschal supper was celebrated, and therefore but two days before Jesus suffered.

The history proceeds—"*And supper being ended* (or rather, as the text should have been translated, *the time of supper being*

*come* [t]) *the Devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the Disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

Thus far all is clear. Jesus condescended to *wash the feet of his Disciples*; a ministry, very common in the East, and usually performed by servants, in discharge of their duty towards their masters, or, by inferiors, at least, in testimony of respect towards their superiors; as is abundantly plain from many instances.

This then was ONE end of this *washing*. Our Saviour meant it as a lesson of humility and condescension to his Disciples. But was it the ONLY, or the *chief* end? That is the point we are now to consider.

t Δείπνου γενομένου—

Let it be remembered, then, that nothing was more familiar with the Jews, than to convey an information to others, especially if that information was of importance, by natural, rather than artificial signs, I mean by *deeds*, rather than *words*; as every one knows, who has but dipped into the history and writings of the Old and New Testament. The transaction before us, if understood *only* as a lesson of humility, is a lesson conveyed to the Disciples in this form[u].

Now, this way of *information by action* was occasionally made to serve two contrary purposes: either to give more force and emphasis to an instruction; or, to cloathe it with some degree of obscurity, or even ambiguity. For *actions*, speaking to the eye, when the purpose of them is by any means clearly ascertained, convey the most lively and expressive information: on the other hand, when it is not, they are somewhat obscure, one thing being to be collected by us from another; or the information is even ambiguous, as the action may signify more things than one.

[u] See more on this subject in the DISCOURSE *on Christ's driving the merchants out of the temple*, at the end of the next volume.

Sometimes, the primary sense is declared, or easily understood; while, yet, a secondary sense, a less apparent one, but more momentous, is, also, intended.

This, upon inquiry, may be the case before us. Christ's *washing the feet of his Disciples* obviously conveys this instruction, which is asserted, too, in express words—that, *as he, their lord and master, washed their feet, so they ought also to wash one another's feet*[x]. But *another*, and far more important, instruction *may* be conveyed in this action, though it be not so fully and explicitly declared. It *may*, I say, be conveyed: from laying all circumstances together, we shall be able to form a judgment, whether it were, indeed, in the Agent's *intention* to convey it.

*First*, as I said, the narrative of this transaction (which, take it as you will, was clearly designed to be an *information by action*) is prefaced in a very extraordinary manner. *Jesus, knowing that his hour was come—knowing too that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God*, proceeded—to

[x] Ver. 14.

do what? Why, to give his disciples a lesson of humility and charity, in washing their feet. The Lesson, no doubt, was important; and becoming the character of their divine master. But does it rise up to those *ideas* of importance, which we are prepared to entertain of an action, performed at such a time, and so awfully introduced? *His hour was come—the Father had given all things into his hands—he came from God, and was now going to God.* All this announces something beyond and above a common lecture of morality; something, which might be a suitable close to the instructions of such a teacher.

Let us see, *next*, how the action is received. One of the disciples, Peter, surprized at his Lord's condescension, says very naturally, *Lord, dost thou wash my feet?* Jesus, to remove his scruples, replies, *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* The words are ambiguous, and may mean, "Thou shalt know, *immediately*, from the explication I am about to give of this action;" or, "thou shalt know *hereafter*, in due time, and by other means," what the purport of it is. Still Peter, not satisfied with this answer, but confounded at the apparent indignity of Christ's condescension, replies resolutely, *Thou shalt*

*never wash my feet.* This resistance was to be overcome, that the *information,* whatever it was, might take place, by the performance of that which was the vehicle of it. Jesus answers, therefore, more directly and solemnly, IF I WASH THEE NOT, THOU HAST NO PART WITH ME—Which words, whether understood by Peter or not, were clearly seen to have *some* meaning of the last concern to him; and, struck with this apprehension, he submits.

But what! taking these oracular words, in the sense only in which Jesus thought fit to explain them, we hardly see the force and propriety of them. For, had Peter *no part with Jesus,* that is, was he incapable of receiving any benefit from him, unless he had this ceremony of washing, performed upon him, when that ceremony had no further use or meaning, than to convey a moral lesson? If he had not learnt *this* lesson from Christ, he might have learnt many *others:* or, he might have learnt *this,* some other way: and taking it in either light, he might still be said to *have some part* with Jesus, though he had not been *washed* by him.

The true import, then, of these enigmatic words, and of the whole transaction which is

here recorded, begins to appear, and is further opened by the sequel of Peter's conversation with Jesus. For, understanding, that this *ablution* was, some way so necessary to him, Peter subjoins, *Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.* Jesus saith to him, *He that is washed, needeth not, save to wash his feet, and is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all; for he knew who should betray him: therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.*

It was, we see, the uncleanness of sin, or the *filth of an evil conscience*, which was to be taken away by this washing. More than a single moral lesson, how excellent soever, was, therefore, couched in this act; indeed, the necessity and efficacy of CERTAIN MEANS, by which mankind were, in general, to be cleansed from sin, was that which was ultimately and mainly signified by it. He that was *thus washed, was clean every whit*; and the *information* of this benefit being the end of the washing, it was enough if that was conveyed by washing any one part.

You see at length to what all this tends. Jesus, knowing the secret treachery of Judas, and, by the divine spirit which was in him, foreseeing the destined effect of that treachery;

knowing, that he was now, forthwith, to suffer death upon the cross, the purpose, for which he came from God, and for the execution of which he only waited before he returned to him; considering, withal, the immense benefit, which was to accrue to mankind from his voluntary devotion of himself to this death, and that the eternal Father, for the sake of it, *had given all things into his hands*, had given him the power to redeem all the sons of Adam from the vassalage of sin and death, by virtue of that BLOOD which he was now to pour out upon the cross, as a propitiation for them; Jesus, I say, foreseeing and considering all this, chose this critical season, when *his hour was now come*, to signify by the ceremony of washing his disciples feet [a], the efficacy and value of his own precious blood, by which alone they, and all mankind, were to have all their sins purged and washed away for ever.

This was apparently the momentous instruction, which it was our Lord's purpose to con-

[a] If it be asked, why their *feet*? the answer is, that it was customary in the east for one to wash the feet of another. And this practice gave an easy introduction to the present enigmatical washing; which was equally expressive of the information designed, when performed on this part of the body, as on any other.

vey in this transaction. He would, *first*, shew that we were to be washed in his blood; and *then*, subordinately, that we were to follow his example in a readiness *to do as he had done*; that is, not only to *wash* each other, but, emblematically still, to lay down our lives and pour out our blood, if need be, for the sake of the brethren. All circumstances concur to assure us, that such was the real secret intent of this mysterious washing; and thus, at length, we understand the full purport of those words —*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me* [b].

[b] Grotius saw the necessity of looking beyond the literal meaning of those words—*If I wash thee not.* "Mos Christi, says he, est a rebus, quæ adspiciuntur, ad sensum sublimiorem ascendere." His comment then follows. "*Nisi te lavero,* id est, nisi *et sermone et spiritu eluero* quod in te restat minus puri," &c. Considering how near Jesus was to his crucifixion, when he said this, one a little wonders how the great commentator, when he was to assign the mystical sense of these words, should overlook that which lay before him. Surely his gloss should have been, *Nisi sanguine meo te eluero,* &c.—Let me just add, that the force of these words, as addressed to Peter, will be perfectly understood, if we reflect that he, who said to Jesus—*Thou shalt never wash my feet*—said on a former occasion to him, when he spoke, without a figure, of his *death* (though not, then, under the idea of a propitiatory sacrifice, or ablution)—*Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.* Matt. xvi. 22. So little did

If it be still said, that Jesus explains his own purpose differently, it is enough to reply, that these emblematic actions were generally significative of more things, than one; and that the manner of Jesus was, on other occasions, to enforce that instruction, which was not the primary one in his intention[c]: the reason of which conduct was founded in this rule, so constantly observed by him, of conveying information to his disciples, only, *as they were able to bear it*[d]. In a word, he gave them many instructions, and *this*, among the rest, darkly and imperfectly, because they could not then bear a stronger light; but yet with such clearness as might, afterwards, let them into his purpose; leaving it to the Holy Ghost (whose peculiar province it was) to illuminate their minds, in due time; to reveal all that had been obscurely intimated; and to open the full meaning of his discourses and actions, as well as to *bring them all to their remembrance*[e].

Peter see the necessity of being *washed* by the blood of Christ! And so important was the information now given him in this *mystical* washing—*If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.*

[c] A remarkable instance will be given, in the Discourse referred to above, at the close of the next volume.

[d] Mark iv. 33. John xvi. 12.

[e] John xiv. 26.

From this memorable part of the Gospel-history, thus opened and explained, we may draw some important conclusions.

1. First, we learn, if the comment here given be a just one, That *the blood of Christ* (so an Apostle hath expressed himself) *cleanseth us from all sin*[f]: I mean, that the death of Christ was a true, proper, and real propitiation for our sins; and not a mere figure, or tropical form of speech; as too many, who call themselves Christians, conceive of it. For the pertinence and propriety of the representative action, performed by our Lord, is founded in this supposition, "That the blood of Christ was necessary to our purification, and that, but for our being *washed in his blood*[e], we should be yet in our sins." Jesus himself, in explaining this transaction, so far as he thought fit to explain it, confines us to this idea. For in this sense, only, is it true—*that we, who are washed, are clean every whit*—and, that *unless we are washed by Christ, we have no part with him.*

Such, then, is the information given us in this ceremony of *washing the disciples feet;*

[f] 1 John i. 7. [e] Rev. i. 5.

and not in this, only. For, besides the present emblematic act, performed by our Lord, for the special benefit of his disciples, the TWO Sacraments, it is to be observed, were purposely instituted, for the general use of his church, to hold forth to us an image of his *efficacious blood*, poured out for us: the sacrament of BAPTISM, by the reference it had (like this act) to the typical *washings* of the Law; and the sacrament of the LORD'S SUPPER, as referring, in like manner, to the typical *sacrifices* of that dispensation. Of such moment, in the view of our Lord himself, was this doctrine of *propitiation!* And so careful, or rather anxious, was he, that this consolatory idea of *redemption through his* BLOOD[h] (suggested in so many ways, and in so striking a manner) should be always present to us!

Nor were his Apostles (let me, further, remark) less intent in prosecuting this design. For they insist every-where, and with a singular emphasis — that *Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us*[i] — and that *we are* WASHED,

h Eph. i. 7. Coloss. i. 14.
i 1 Cor. v. 7.

*and sanctified, and saved, by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus* [k].

Go now, then, and say, that the *blood* of Christ is only a metaphor, and means no more in the mouth of a Christian, than it might be supposed to do in that of an honest heathen, who should say, That he had been *saved*, or benefited in a moral way, by the *blood*, that is, the exemplary death, of Socrates! — When we speak of its *washing* away sin, it is true, we use the term *washing* metaphorically (for *sin* is not literally washed): but the scriptures are unintelligible, and language itself has no meaning, if *the blood of the lamb slain* had not a true, direct, and proper efficacy (considered in the literal sense of *blood)* in freeing us from the *guilt* of sin, or, in other words, from the *punishment* of it.

2. A SECOND conclusion may be drawn, more particularly, from the words of the text — *if I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.* For, if these words mean, as I have endeavoured to shew, and as, I think, they must mean, that we are redeemed only by the *blood* of Christ; and if, as the context seems to speak, it is in our power to forfeit this benefit,

k 1 Pet. i. 18. 1 Cor. vi. 11. and elsewhere, *passim*.

by refusing to be *washed* by his blood, that is, to accept the deliverance, offered to us, *through faith in his blood*[l]: it follows, that there is something very alarming in the condition of those persons, who hold out against all the calls of Grace, and obstinately persist in a state of infidelity. In vain have they recourse to natural religion, or to any other supposed means of purification and salvation. In vain do they trust even to the moral part of the Gospel, while they reject or disbelieve the rest. They must be washed by *Christ*, if they desire *to have any part with him*; they must place their entire hope and confidence in the *blood* of the covenant, who would share in the blessings of it.

Nay, more than this: the Redeemer is *outraged* by this refusal to comply with the gracious terms of his salvation. And, though some may make slight of *having no part with Christ*, it may concern them to reflect, what it is to *have a portion with unbelievers*[m].

3. Lastly, and above all, I conclude, that they, who are *washed*, and, in consequence of that washing, trust to *have a part with Christ*,

[l] Rom. iii. 25. [m] Luke xii. 46.

# SERMON XI.

PREACHED JUNE 20, 1773.

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MARK ix. 49.

*For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.*

THIS is generally esteemed one of the most difficult passages in the four Gospels. I confess, I take no pleasure in commenting on such passages, especially in this place; because the comment only serves, for the most part, to gratify a learned curiosity, and is, otherwise, of small use.

But, when a difficult text of Scripture can be explained, and the sense, arising out of the

explanation, is edifying and important, then it falls properly within our province to exert our best pains upon it.

This I take to be the case of the difficulty before us, which therefore I shall beg leave to make the subject of the present discourse.

There are two very different interpretations, of which the words are capable: and they shall both of them be laid before you, that ye may adopt either, as ye think fit; or even reject them both, if ye do not find them sufficiently supported.

To enable you to go along with me in what follows, and to judge of either interpretation, whether it be reasonable or not, it is necessary to call your attention to the preceding verses of this chapter, to which the text refers, and by which it is introduced.

Our blessed Lord (for the words, I am about to explain, are *his*) had been discoursing to his Disciples on *offences*, or *scandals*; that is, such instances of ill-conduct, such indulgences of any favourite and vicious inclination, as tended to obstruct the progress of the Gospel, and were likely to prevent either themselves,

or others, from embracing, or holding fast, the faith. Such offences, it was foreseen, would come: *but woe to that man* (as we read in the parallel passage of St. Matthew's Gospel) *by whom the offence cometh* P.

And, to give the greater effect to this salutary denunciation, our Saviour proceeds, in figurative, indeed, but very intelligible terms, to enforce the necessity of being on our guard against such *offences*, what pain soever it might cost us to subdue those passions, from which they were ready to spring. No virtue of self-denial was too great to be attempted in such a cause. A *hand*, a *foot*, an *eye*, were to be *cut off*, or *plucked out*; that is, inclinations, as necessary and as dear to us, as those members of the body, were to be suppressed or rejected by us, rather than the *woe*, denounced against the indulgence of them, be incurred. This woe is, that the offenders should be cast into hell-fire, *where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*: and it is subjoined *three times*, in the same awful words, to so many instances of supposed criminal indulgence, in the case alledged; or rather, to one and the *same* species of ill-conduct, differently modified,

P Matt. xviii. 7.

and, to make the greater impression upon us, represented under three distinct images. After the last repetition of it, the text immediately follows—*for every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.*

I. Now, taken in this connexion, the words *may* clearly, and, according to our ideas, of interpretation, most naturally *do*, admit this sense; that the offenders, spoken of, shall be preserved entire to suffer the punishment threatened, though it might seem that they would, in no long time, be totally destroyed by it: as if our Lord had expressed himself thus—"I have repeated this woe three times, to shew you the degree and duration of it, as well as the certainty of its execution; *the worm shall not die*, that is, the sense of suffering shall continue, even in circumstances, which may seem proper and likely to put an end to it: for such, as are worthy to be cast into this fire, shall be *salted*, or preserved from wasting (salt being the known emblem of *incorruption*, and thence of *perpetuity*) by the very fire itself. And [you may easily conceive how this shall be, *for*] *every sacrifice*, the flesh of every animal to be offered up to God in your Jewish sacrifices, is kept sound and fit for use by being (as the Law directs in that case)

*salted with salt.* Just so, the *fire itself* shall act on these victims of the divine justice: like *salt*, sprinkled on your legal victims, it shall preserve these offenders entire, and in a perpetual capacity of subsisting to that use, to which they are destined."

Now, if such be the sense of the words, they contain the fullest and most decisive proof of that tremendous doctrine, *the eternity of future punishments*, which is any where to be met with in Scripture. For the words, being given as a reason and explanation of the doctrine, are not susceptible of any vague interpretation, like the words *eternal* or *everlasting*, in which it is usually expressed; but must necessarily be understood, as implying and affirming the literal truth of the thing, for which they would account. And, this being supposed, you see the use, the unspeakable importance, of this text, as addressed to all believers in Jesus. But,

II. There is another sense, of which the text is capable: and, if you think it not allowable to deduce a conclusion of such dreadful import from words of an ambiguous signification, you will incline perhaps (as it is natural for us to do) to this more favourable interpretation, which I am going to propose.

I observed, that the text, as read in connexion with the preceding verse, is most naturally, according to our ideas of interpretation, to be understood, as I have already explained it. But, what is the most *natural*, according to our modern rules and principles of construction, is not always the *true*, sense of passages in ancient oriental writers (who did not affect our accuracy of connexion), and particularly in the writers of the New Testament.

To give a remarkable instance in a discourse of our Lord himself. He had prescribed to his disciples that form of prayer, which we know by the name of the *Lord's prayer*, consisting of several articles; the last of which is — *for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever* [q]. Now, to this concluding sentence of his prayer he immediately subjoins these words — FOR *if we forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.* But, from the illative particle, *for*, according to our notions of exact composition, was to be expected a reason, or illustration, of the *immediately foregoing* clause, the *doxology*, which shuts up this prayer: whereas, the words, which that par-

q Matt. vi.

ticle introduces, have respect to another and *remote* clause in the same prayer, namely, *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*[r], and express the ground and reason, only, of that petition.

In like manner, the illation expressed in the text—FOR *every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt*——may not be intended to respect the preceding words—*where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*—but something else, which had been advanced in our Lord's discourse, though at some distance from the text; and possibly, the general scope or *subject* of it. Consider, then, what that subject is. It is necessary, our Lord tells his disciples, for such as would escape the woes, threatened, and approve themselves faithful followers of him, to subdue or renounce their most favourite inclinations, by which they might be, at any time, tempted to *offend*, though the pain of this self-denial should be ever so grievous to them.

To reconcile their minds to this harsh doctrine, he may then be supposed to resume that

r Ver. 12.

topic, and to *justify* the advice, which, with so much apparent severity, he had given them. And then we may conceive him to speak to this effect:

"I have said, you must not regard the *uneasiness*, which the conduct, I require of you, will probably occasion. For *every one*, that is, every true Christian, *every one* that is consecrated to my service, and would escape the punishment by *fire*, in the world to come, *shall be salted with fire*, in the present world; that is, shall be tried with sufferings of one kind or other, can only expect to be continued in a sound and uncorrupt state, by *afflictions*; which must search, cleanse, and purify your lives and minds, just as *fire* does those bodies, which it refines, by consuming all the dross and refuse, contained in them. The process may be violent, but the end is most desirable, and even necessary. *And*, that it is so, ye may discern from the wisdom of your own Law, which requires that *every sacrifice*, fit to be offered up to God in the temple-service, *shall be salted with salt*; that is, preserved from putrefaction, and even all approaches to it, by the application of that useful, though corroding substance. Now, the *fire* of affliction shall be to your moral natures, what *salt*

is to the animal. It may agitate and torment your minds, but it shall eat all the principles of corruption out of them, and so keep them clean and untainted; as is fit, considering the heavenly use that is to be made of them, it being your duty, and even interest, to present them, as *a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God*[s]."

In this way, you see, the text is reasonably explained of *moral discipline* in this world, not of future *punishment*. What may be thought to occasion some little difficulty, or, at least, particularity, in the mode of writing, is, that *one* metaphor seems here employed to explain *another*. But we should rather conceive of the two metaphors, as employed, jointly and severally, to express this moral sentiment — 'That affliction contributes to preserve and improve our virtue.' The allusion to the effects of *salt* was exceedingly obvious and natural in the mouth of a Jew, addressing himself to Jews[t]. Not but it was common enough, too, in Gentile writers[u]. And the other allusion to the effects of *fire* (though the two figures are in a manner run together by speaking of

[s] Phil. iv. 18.

[t] See Whitby in loc.

[u] See passages cited by Dr. Hammond.

the *subject*, to which they are applied, as *salted* with fire). This allusion, I say, to *fire*, is justified by the familiar use of it, in the sacred writings. For thus we are told, *that fire must try every man's work* [a]—that *our faith is tried, as gold by fire* [b]—that *a fiery trial must try us* [c]—that, *as gold is tried in the fire*, so are *acceptable men in the furnace of adversity* [d]—and in other instances.

Of *both* these natural images, it may be affirmed, that they are not unusually applied to moral subjects: and, if we thus *apply* them in the text, the *use* to ourselves, according to this interpretation, is considerable and even important; no less, than the seeing enforced, in the most lively manner, and by our Saviour himself, this great moral and evangelical lesson —*that the virtue of a good mind must be maintained at whatever expence of trouble and self-denial*—and for this plain reason, because, though *no chastening for the present seem to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them, which are exercised thereby* [e].

[a] 1 Cor. iii. 13.
[b] 1 Pet. i. 7.
[c] 1 Pet. iv. 12.
[d] Eccles. ii. 5.
[e] Heb. xii. 1.

And, that such is probably the true sense of the text, we have been considering, may further be concluded from the light it throws on the following and last verse of this chapter; the meaning of which will now be very plain and consequential, as may be shewn in few words.

For, having spoken of *Christian discipline* under the name of *salt*, which *preserves* what it searches, our Lord very naturally takes advantage of this idea, and transfers the appellation to *Christian faith*, which was necessary to support his followers under that discipline, and has this property, in common with *salt*, that it gives soundness and incorruption to the subject on which it operates. *Salt*, says he, *is good: but, if salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?* That is, *faith in me* (for by *salt*, you easily perceive, I now mean that faith, which is your true *seasoning*, and can alone maintain your firmness and integrity under all trials; this *faith*, I say) is a salutary principle: but take notice, if you suffer that principle, so active and efficacious, to decay and lose its virtue, there are no means left to retrieve it. Like *salt*, grown insipid, it can never recover its former quality, but is for ever

worthless and useless [f]. Therefore, adds he, take care to *have*, that is, retain, this *salt*, this good seasoning of your Christian principles, *in yourselves*; which will preserve you incorrupt, as *individuals*: and, as *salt*, from its necessary use at the table, is further an emblem of union and friendship, give proof of these principles in your intercourse with all Christians, so as to keep *peace one with another*; for, by this *seasoning* of peace, ye will best preserve yourselves entire, as *a body of men*, or society [g].

We see, then, that understanding this *fire*, with which *every one shall be salted*, of the fire of *affliction* only, which, like salt, is to

[f] Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

[g] The difficulty in the two concluding verses of this chapter, arises from a *vivacity of imagination in the pursuit and application of metaphors*; a faculty, in which the Orientals excelled, and delighted. They pass suddenly from one idea to another, nearly, and sometimes, remotely, allied to it. They relinquish the primary sense, for another suggested by it; and without giving any notice, as we should do, of their intention. These numerous *reflected lights*, as we may call them, eagerly catched at by the mind in its train of thinking, perplex the attention of a modern reader, and must be carefully separated by him, if he would see the whole scope and purpose of many passages in the sacred writings.

try and preserve the moral integrity of all believers, and not of the *fire which dieth not*, and, according to the former interpretation, was to preserve *offenders* in a perpetual capacity of enduring future punishment; understanding, I say, this metaphor in the former sense, we have an easy, elegant, and extremely useful sense in the words of the text: a sense, which perfectly agrees with what precedes the text, and illustrates what follows it: whereas, in the other way of explaining these words, it will be difficult to shew their coherence with the subsequent verse, though they admit an application to the foregoing.

On the whole, I leave it to yourselves to judge, which of the two interpretations, now proposed to you, is the proper one. I know of no other, that so well deserves your notice, as these two: and, if *either* of them be admissible, we have gained the satisfaction of understanding a very obscure passage of holy Scripture. But we have gained more, than this; for, whichever we prefer, a momentous inference may be drawn from it. EITHER, we must resolve to stick close to our CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRINCIPLES, as the only means of preserving our integrity, and making us fit for the

favour of God, to whatever trials of any kind they may expose us: OR, we shall have to reflect, what SUFFERING, terrible beyond imagination, is reserved for obstinately impenitent and incorrigible sinners.

# SERMON XII.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 9, 1766.

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GAL. vi. 3.

*If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*

THIS is one of those many passages in the sacred writings, in which the simplicity of the expression is apt to make us overlook the profound sense contained under it. Who doubts, it may be said, the truth of so general an axiom, as this? and what information, worth treasuring up in the memory, is conveyed by it?

In answer to such questions, as these, it may be observed, That the inspired writers

are not singular in this practice; the moral wisdom of all nations, and, in particular, that of the ancient Pagan sages (whom these objectors, no doubt, reverence) being usually conveyed in such large and general aphorisms: and, further, that many good reasons may be given for this mode of instruction.

FIRST, *the necessity of the thing*, in times, when men have not been accustomed to refine on moral subjects: it is also *necessary* in another sense, in order to convey the rules of life in some reasonable compass. Good sense in moral matters is but the experience of observing men, the result of which must be given in compendious parcels or collections; otherwise the memory is loaded too much; besides that neither the leisure, nor the talents of those, for whom these lessons are designed, will serve for nicer disquisitions.

SECONDLY, if this *mode* of teaching were not necessary, it would still be preferable to any other for its *own proper dignity*. A philosopher in the schools, or a divine in his closet, may deduce the laws of morality with a minute exactness. But the authority of an Apostle disdains this care, and awakens the consciences of men by some *general* precept, by some large

and *comprehensive* observation. It becomes the majesty of his character to deliver the principles of right conduct in *few and weighty words:* his precepts are *Laws;* and his observations, *Oracles:* it is for others to speculate upon them with curiosity, and draw them out into systems.

THIRDLY, sometimes the very address of a writer leads him to *generalize* his observations. It is, when a more direct and pointed manner would press too closely on the mind, and, by making the application necessary, indispose us to conviction; whereas, when a reproof presents itself in this form, less offence is likely to be given by it, the application being left, in a good degree, to ourselves.

This last, we shall find, was the case of St. Paul in the text; in whose behalf, therefore, we need not, in the present instance, plead the *necessity*, the *convenience*, or the *dignity* of this method of instruction; though these reasons, we see, might, on other occasions, be very justly alledged.

For, to come now to the aphorism in the text—*If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself*—as

trivial as this general truth may appear at first sight, we shall perceive, by turning to the context, that the inspired writer applies it with infinite address to mortify the pride of some persons, against whom the tenour of his discourse is there directed. For certain false teachers, it seems, had very early crept into the churches of *Galatia*, who arrogated a superior wisdom to themselves, and, on the credit of this claim, presumed to impose the yoke of Jewish ordinances on the Gentile converts: in direct opposition to the injunctions of the Apostle, who had lately planted these churches; and in manifest violation of Christian charity, which forbad those grievous burthens to be laid on the consciences of believers.

One natural feature in the character of these vain-glorious boasters, was the contempt with which they treated the more infirm Christians, and the little consideration they had for such of their brethren as happened to be *overtaken with any fault*. This proud, unchristian temper he therefore takes upon him to correct — *Brethren*, says he, *if any man be overtaken with a fault, you, that are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted: Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law*

*of Christ.* And then follows the observation of the text—*for, if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself:* leaving the conceited Doctors and their admirers to apply these general words, as they saw fit; but clearly enough pointing to some persons among them, *who took themselves to be something*, and yet miserably *deceived themselves*, in that, indeed, they *were nothing.* In what respects their conduct shewed them to be so, he leaves to their own sagacity, quickened by the poignancy of this covert reproof, to find out.

Such is the Apostle's *address* in this divine admonition; and such the *force* (the greater, *for* the address) of the reprehension conveyed in it!

But now, what those RESPECTS are, in which these sufficient men shewed themselves *to be nothing*, though St. Paul thought it not fit to specify them to the *Galatians*, it may be *useful* to *us*, as it certainly is left *free* for us, to inquire.

FIRST, then, their very *Conceit* was a certain argument of their *Folly*. For, what surer indication of a weak and shallow man, than

his proneness to think highly of himself! Wise men understand themselves at another rate. They are too conscious of their own infirmities; they know their judgment to be too fallible, their apprehension too slow, their knowledge too scanty, their wills too feeble, and their passions too strong, to give way to this insolent exultation of heart, to indulge in this conceit of their own importance, and much less to form injurious comparisons between themselves and others. They understand, that the only question is concerning the different degrees of *weakness and imperfection*; and that, where the best come far short of what they should be, all pretence of boasting is cut off.

SECONDLY, these superior airs of importance were unsuitable to the nature of their religion, and shewed how little proficiency they had made in it; BECAUSE, as *Christians*, whatever light and knowledge they laid claim to, they must needs confess was not their own, but derived to them from above. All, these spiritual men could pretend to know of divine things, had been freely and solely revealed to them by the Spirit of God; a distinction, which ought indeed to fill their hearts with gratitude, but could be no proper foundation of their pride or vain-glory. For, as the Apostle himself argues

in another place, *Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, which thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it* [a]?

Whatever temptation, therefore, there might be to a poor vain heathen to pride himself in his pittance of knowledge or virtue, a CHRISTIAN should, by the very principles of his religion, be more modest, and ascribe his proficiency in either, not to himself, but to the indulgent favour and good pleasure of God.

THIRDLY, these boasters betrayed themselves by the *fruits*, which this self-importance produced, namely, their contemptuous and unfeeling treatment of their brethren under any instance of their weakness and frailty. Such behaviour was doubly ridiculous: *first*, as it implied an ignorance of their own infirmity, and liableness to temptation; and, *then*, as it argued a total want of *Charity*, the most essential part of their religion, without which a man is *nothing*, whatever gifts and graces of other kinds he may possess [b].

[a] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [b] 1 Cor. xiii.

FOURTHLY, whatever merit a man may possess, this fond complacency of mind can hardly fail to *deprive* him of it. For this conceit of his own sufficiency puts him off his guard, and makes him more liable to fall into any *misconduct*, when, apprehending no danger to himself, he employs no care; just as nothing is more fatal to an army, than a confidence in its own strength, inducing a neglect of that watchfulness and discipline, by which alone its security can be maintained.

This sufficiency also leads to *ignorance*, as well as misconduct, by cutting off all hopes of further improvement. For he, that is proud of his own knowledge, is not anxious to extend it; and, indeed, does not easily apprehend there is much room or occasion for his so doing. Now, from the moment a man stands still, and interrupts his intellectual, as well as moral course, by the known constitution of things, he necessarily goes backward; and, for his just punishment, relapses fast into that ignorance, in a freedom from which he had before placed his confidence and triumph.

*Lastly*, this presumptuous conceit is *belyed* in the EVENT, I mean in the opinion of those very persons, to whom the vain man would

willingly recommend himself. For the natural effect of such presumption is, to excite the *contempt* of the wise, and the *envy* of the rest. Men of discernment easily penetrate the delusion, and, knowing how little reason there is for any man to pride himself in his knowledge or virtue, are provoked to entertain an ostentatious display of those qualities with that ridicule, it so well deserves: while the weaker sort always take themselves to be insulted by superior accomplishments; and rarely wait the just provocation of *vain-glory* to malign and envy those, to whom they belong.

But the misfortune does not stop here. Contempt and Envy are active and vigilant passions; they are quick at espying a weakness, and spare no pains to expose it: and where can this merciless inquisition end, but in the proud man's mortification to see his best faculties slighted, or traduced, and all his imperfections laid bare and exposed? So good reason had the Apostle to warn the Galatian teachers against *vain-glory*, in the close of the preceding chapter—*Let us*, says he, *not be vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another*; an exhortation which the *vain-glorious* among them should have listened to, even for their own sakes.

We see, then, that, *in these several respects*, a man, who *takes himself to be something*, in effect proves himself *to be nothing*. So full of instruction is the plain unpretending aphorism in the text to the persons concerned!

The Apostle adds — that such a man DECEIVETH HIMSELF — which must needs be, and cannot want to be enlarged upon; since it appears in the very instances, in which his *nothingness* has been shewn. The *vain-glorious* Christian is manifestly and notoriously deceived in *thinking himself something* — while that very conceit shews the contrary — while it shews that he overlooks the very principles of his religion — while it proves him to be void of Christian charity, the very end of the commandment — while it betrays him into ignorance and folly, and therefore tends to subvert the very foundation, on which his *vain-glory* is raised — while, lastly, in the event, it deprives him of that very consideration to which he aspires.

"SUCH are the mischiefs of *Self-conceit!* a vice, which Reason universally condemns, but which our Christian profession renders most contemptible and ridiculous. Even in

the pursuits of *human* Science, where Reason can do most, all the efforts of the ablest understanding penetrate but a little way. We know enough of *the nature of things*, to serve the purposes of common life; and enough of *the nature of man*, to discover our duty towards each other. And within this narrow circle all our knowledge, be we as proud of it as we please, is confined. Clouds and darkness cover the rest; and this the ablest men of all times have seen and confessed. If there be a man, whom Heaven has formed with greater powers and stronger faculties than are commonly met with in the species, he is the *first* to discover, and to lament, his own blindness and weakness: a Socrates and a Pascal have been considered as prodigies of parts and ingenuity; yet, while the meanest Sophister is puffed up with the conceit of his own knowledge, these divine men confess nothing so readily as their own ignorance.

And, if this be the case of human learning, what must we think of *divine?* where Reason teaches nothing, beyond the existence and attributes of God, and, as to every thing else, without the aid of *Revelation*, is stark-blind. *The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God* — is an assertion, to which com-

mon sense and common experience must assent. Yet shall every idle Speculatist, who has but the confidence to call himself a Philosopher, treat the *divine word*, as freely as any ordinary subject; and pronounce as peremptorily of the *revealed will of God*, which the Angels themselves adore in silence, as if he knew for certain that his poor and scanty understanding was commensurate with *the councils of the most High!*

To these professors of Science, whether human or divine, who know so little of themselves as to presume they know every thing, may the Apostle's aphorism be most fitly addressed — *If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself;* — and, through all the simplicity of the expression, the good sense of the observation must be felt by the proudest understanding.

Not, that the proper remedy for this evil, of *Self-conceit*, is a vile subjection of the understanding, which our holy Religion disdains, and to which none but slaves will submit—nor yet Scepticism, another vice, to which the less sanguine disputers of this world are much addicted—but a modest use of the faculties we possess, and above all, *charity*. It

is but another species of *pride*, to pretend that we know nothing; *Christian humility* is best expressed in referring, what we know, to the good of others. Without this reference, all our claims of superior wisdom are vain and delusive: for it is with *knowledge*, as with faith, unless it *work by charity*, it is nothing.

To return to the text, then, and to conclude.

Let the ignominy of this *Self-delusion* deter us, if nothing else can, from the unseemly arrogance, it so well exposes and condemns. And let us learn to revere the wisdom of the great Apostle, who, by couching so momentous an admonition in so plain terms, has taught us, That, as conceit and vain-glory terminate in shame and disappointment; so the modesty of unpretending knowledge may be entitled to our highest esteem.

# SERMON XIII.

PREACHED MAY 16, 1773.

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2 Cor. x. 12.

*We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves, with some that commend themselves: But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

I SHALL not inquire, *who* the persons were, to whom these words are applied. It is enough, for the use I intend to make of them, to observe, that they contain a censure of *some* persons, "who, conscious of certain advan-"tages, and too much taken up in the con-"templation of them, came to think better of

"themselves, and, consequently, worse of "others, than they had reason to do; demon-"strating, by this, their partiality (as the "Apostle gently remonstrates), that *they were* "*not wise*."

But this censure admits a more extensive application. *Measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*, whole nations, and even ages, as well as individuals, are, sometimes, misled in the estimate they make of their own worth; and never more easily, or remarkably, than when the object of their partial fondness is their proficiency in *knowledge*, and, above all, in *religious* knowledge: for nothing flatters the pride of human nature so much, as an idea of superiority in the exercise of its *best faculties*, on the *noblest subjects*.

It would be easy to illustrate this observation by *many* examples, that have occurred in the history of mankind. But ONE, only, will sufficiently employ your thoughts at this time; and that one (to make it the more interesting and useful) shall be taken from OURSELVES.

The improvements, that have been made, for two or three centuries past, in almost every

art and science, seem to authorize the *present age* to think with some respect, of itself. It accordingly exults in the idea of its own wisdom: and *this country*, in particular, which has contributed its full share to those improvements, may well be thought as forward, as any other, to pay itself this tribute of self-esteem. It would not be strange, if it appeared, on inquiry, That some *presumption* had, in either case, been indulged; and had even operated, according to the *nature* of presumption, to the prejudice of that claim, which, with so much confidence, has been set up. But I have now in view, only, *one effect* of this presumption; I mean, the complacency which many take in supposing, That the *present age* excels equally in *sacred* and *secular* learning; and, with regard to ourselves, That *our* theological knowledge as much surpasses that of our forefathers at the Reformation, as *their* knowledge did, the thick and gross ignorance of the monkish ages.

It concerns us, for more reasons than one, not to mistake in this matter. The direct way to decide upon it, would, no doubt, be, To compare the best modern writers, with the ablest of those among the Reformers, on the subject of religion. But, till ye have the leisure or

curiosity to make this comparison for yourselves, ye will pay some regard, it may be, to the following considerations; which, at least, I think, make it questionable, whether *our* claims, in particular (for the inquiry shall, for the present, be confined to them), whether, I say, *our* pretensions to religious knowledge have not been carried too far. And,

1. One is tempted to ask, whether it be credible, that we of this age should have much advantage over our Reformers, in respect of religious knowledge, when both had an opportunity of deriving it from the same source? You will apprehend the meaning of this question, if you reflect, that our Reformers had not their religious system to fetch out of the dark rolls of ancient tradition, and much less to create, or fashion for themselves, out of their own proper stock of ingenuity and invention. Had such been their unhappy circumstances, there would be reason enough to presume that their system was defective. For the first attempts towards perfection in any art, or science, will not bear a comparison with those happier and more successful efforts, which a length of time and continued application enable men to make. But the case of those good men, we know, was wholly different. They had only

to copy, or, rather, to inspect, a consummate model, made to their hands; I mean, the *sacred scriptures*, which lay open to them, as they do to us; and, being taken by them, as we understand they were, for their *sole* rule of faith, what should hinder them, when they *read* those scriptures, from seeing as distinctly, as we do at this day, what the Gospel-terms of salvation are, and what *the erudition of a Christian man* should be?

Did the primitive Christians, a plain people, and taken, for the most part, from the lowest ranks of life, did *they* understand their religion, when it was proposed to them, so as to have no doubt concerning its great and leading principles; nay, so as to be the standard of orthodoxy to all succeeding ages of the Church? and shall we think that the ablest Doctors at the Reformation, when they had once turned themselves to the study of the sacred volumes, could be at a loss about the contents of them?

"Yes, it will, perhaps, be said; the primitive Christians had the advantage of reading the scriptures in the languages in which they were composed, or of hearing them explained, at least, by learned and well-instructed teachers:

whereas, at the Reformation, those languages were understood by few, or none; and consequently, in those days, there could be no persons sufficiently skilled in the sacred scriptures to ascertain their true meaning."

But to this charge of ignorance you will easily reply, by asking,

2. In the next place, whether it can consist with a *known fact*, namely, That the revival of letters had preceded the Reformation everywhere, especially in England; and that the excellent persons who took the lead in that work, were all of them, competently, and, some of them, deeply, skilled in the learned languages?

Indeed, in the nature of the thing, it is scarce possible, that the Reformers should be so little versed, as the objection supposes, in the original scriptures. For, whether the *new learning* as it was called, had, or had not, been cultivated, *before* the Reformation began, we may be sure it would *then* be cultivated with the utmost assiduity; both, because it was a *new* learning, that is, because the charms of novelty would naturally engage many in the study of it; and, because no step could be taken in the

Reformation, without some proficiency in *that* learning. Now, if you consider, of what the human mind is capable, when pushed on by two such active principles, as *learned curiosity*, and *religious zeal*, you will conclude with yourselves, even without recurring to positive testimony, that the Reformers must needs have made an acquaintance with the authentic text: *such* an acquaintance, as would let them into a clear apprehension, at least, of those doctrines, which are the *elementary*, as we may say, or necessary ingredients in the constitution of a truly Christian Church.

If you hesitate about coming to this conclusion, the reason, I suppose, is, that you consider the Reformers as just then emerging from the darkness of Popery, and therefore so far blinded by the prejudices of *that* church[a], or by their own[b] prejudices against it, as not to see distinctly, and at once, the true sense of Scripture, though they might be competently skilled in the learned languages. And, possibly, there is some truth, as well as plausibility, in this suggestion, as applied to the

[a] As in the case of the *real presence* in the sacrament of the altar.

[b] As in the case of *good works*.

case of the foreign Protestant Churches, which were formed with too much haste, and in a time of too much heat, to be quite free from all such exceptions. But, then, you will call to mind,

3. *Thirdly*, that the Reformation was not carried on with us in a precipitate tumultuary manner, as it was, for the most part, on the Continent. On the other hand, it advanced, under the eye of the magistrate, by slow degrees; nay, it was, more than once, checked and kept back by him. Hence it came to pass, that there was time allowed for taking the full benefit of all discoveries, made abroad; for studying the chief points of controversy, with care; and for getting rid of such mistakes, as might arise from a hasty or passionate interpretation of holy Scripture. In short, you will reflect, that, between the first contentions in Germany, on the account of Religion, and the final establishment of it in the Church of England, under Elizabeth, there was the space of near half a century: a space, sufficient, you will think (especially, if the activity of those times be considered) to admit all the *improvements of learning*, that were necessary to those who had the charge of conducting the Reformation; and all the *deliberate circum-*

*spection*, with which it was fit that so great a work should be finally completed.

If it be said, "that the Reformers are convicted of ignorance in *one* important part of scriptural knowledge, that of *Toleration*, and that therefore, possibly, they have erred in others;" I reply, that this subject had never been understood, from the first establishment of Christianity down to the æra of the Reformation; and that the mistakes about it had, chiefly, arisen, not from a want of seeing what the Scriptures had revealed, but of knowing how to reconcile the New Testament to the Old. If we are, now, able to do this, it is well. In the mean time, let it be acknowledged, that no peculiar charge of ignorance can be brought against the Reformers for misapprehending a subject, not only difficult in itself, but perplexed with endless prejudices, and not yet, as appears, quite disentangled of them. After all, this doctrine of intolerance, though it unhappily affected the *personal conduct* of our Reformers, has no place in the LITURGY and ARTICLES of our Church.

Still, perhaps, the main point, on which this question, concerning the comparative skill of the two periods, in matters of religion, turns,

is yet untouched; which is, that the amazing progress, confessedly made, since the æra of the Reformation, in all true *Philosophy*, must have contributed very largely to the increase of *religious* knowledge; and that so much light of science, as we now enjoy, must have served to give us a clearer insight, than our benighted ancestors had, into the *revealed doctrines of* Christianity.

But to this so flattering, and, at first view, not improbable, assumption, it may be replied,

4. In the last place, That the doctrines in question, being *purely Christian*, that is, such as it pleased God to reveal to mankind concerning his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, —that the doctrines, I say, having this original, and being of this nature, have, possibly, no communication with the discoveries of later times: that, of the divine councils, on such a subject, we could have known nothing, if the Revelation had been silent; and that all we *do* know, when it speaks clearest, is only *what* those councils are, not on what *grounds* of reason they stand; whether it be, that such knowledge is unattainable by our faculties, or that it was seen to be improper for our situation: that, to say the least, all the efforts of

the ablest men to explain the peculiar fundamental doctrines of our religion, on the principles of our philosophy, have not hitherto been so successful, as to make it certain that these doctrines are indeed cognisable by human reason: that possibly, therefore, those doctrines are the objects of *faith*, simply, and not of knowledge; in other words, that they are no clearer to us at this day, than they were to those plainer men, who lived in the sixteenth century[e].

[e] An ingenious writer, who appears not to have been hackneyed in the ways of controversy, and is, therefore, the more likely to see the truth, in any plain question of religion, as well as to declare it, expresses himself, fully, to the same effect—"It is very weakly urged, that religion should keep pace with science in improvement; and that a subscription to articles must always impede its progress: for nothing can be more absurd than the idea of a progressive religion; which, being founded upon the declared, not the imagined, will of God, must, if it attempt to proceed, relinquish that Revelation which is its basis, and so cease to be a religion founded upon God's word. God has revealed himself; and all that he has spoken, and consequently all that is demanded of us to accede to, is declared in one book, from which nothing is to be retrenched, and to which nothing can be added. All that it contains, was as perspicuous to those who first perused it, after the rejection of the papal yoke, as it can be to us NOW, or as it can be to our posterity in the FIFTIETH GENERATION. See *A Scriptural Confutation of Mr. Lindsey's Apology*. Lond. 1774. p. 220.

And now, if we recollect the substance of what has been said — That our Reformers had only to consult the *Scriptures* for a just idea of the Christian Religion — that they were likely enough to *understand* those Scriptures, being invited, or rather impelled, to the study of them, by the most active principles of human nature — that they *could not but* understand those Scriptures in all the more important points of doctrine, which they had so much time and occasion to consider, and which these wanted no more than a common skill in the language of Scripture to understand—and that, lastly, they could not have understood those points *better*, than they did, even with all our real or fancied skill in philosophy, because, in truth, philosophy is not applicable to those points, being matters of pure Revelation, and not susceptible of any additional clearness from the exertion of our best faculties, however improved: — If these things, I say, are put together, we shall conceive it possible for our Reformers to have acquired such a knowledge, at least, of their religion, as not to deserve that utter contempt, with which, on a comparison with ourselves, they are, sometimes, treated.

But a single FACT will, perhaps, speak more conviction to you, than all these general pre-

sumptive reasonings. When the question is, therefore, concerning the degree of religious knowledge, which such men as Cranmer and Ridley possessed, let it be remembered, "That Erasmus (who lived and died before the English Reformation had made any considerable progress, and the benefit of all whose light and knowledge those Reformers, therefore, had) that this learned man, I say, had, in those days, explained himself as reasonably, on almost every great topic of revealed religion, as any writer has since done, or is now able to do."

This *fact*, however, does not imply, that the age of the Reformation was equally enlightened with the present; or that the clearer light, we enjoy, is of no service to religion. Our improved CRITICISM has been of use in ascertaining the authority, and, sometimes, in clearing the smaller difficulties, of the sacred text; and our improved PHILOSOPHY has enabled many great men to set the evidences of revealed religion, in a juster and stronger light: but, with the *doctrines* themselves, our improvements, of whatever kind, have no concern. Be our proficiency in human science what it may, those doctrines are the *same* still. Reason, under any degree of cultivation, may, if we please to misapply it, perplex and cor-

rupt our faith; but will never be able to see to the bottom of those *judgments*, which are *unsearchable*, nor to clear up those *ways*, which are *past finding out*[d].

To conclude: I am not, now, making the panegyric of those venerable men, to whom we are indebted for our religious establishment. They were our inferiors, if you will, in many respects. But, if, *measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves*, we overlook their real abilities and qualifications; if we pronounce them ignorant of *good letters*, because they lived in an age, which we have learned to call barbarous; and ignorant of the *Christian religion*, because they were not practised in our philosophy; we, probably, do THEM great injustice, and take, it may be, not the best method of doing honour to OURSELVES.

[d] Rom. xi. 33.

# SERMON XIV.

PREACHED APRIL 27, 1766.

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St. MARK, iv. 24.

*Take heed what ye hear.*

Or, as the equivalent phrase is in

St. LUKE, viii. 18.

*Take heed* HOW *ye hear.*

*FAITH*, says the Apostle, *cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*[a]. The assertion was strictly true in the early days of the Gospel, before books were yet written and spread abroad for the edification of the Church. The inlet of faith was, then, the *ear* : through that organ only was conveyed, from the tongue

[a] Rom. x. 17.

of the preacher, *the word of God.* But the case is much the same at all times; even *now,* when books are enough multiplied, and perhaps more than enough, in the Christian world. For, it having pleased God, that a standing ministry should be kept up for the instruction of mankind in *the faith,* and a *woe* being denounced against such, as have received this commission, and yet *preach not the Gospel* [b], the *sole* way by which *faith cometh* to most men, and the *principal,* by which it cometh to almost all, is still that of *hearing.* It is still by the *word preached,* that men, in general, come to the faith of Christ, and are confirmed in the profession of it.

Our Lord, then, foreseeing how much would depend on this faculty of *hearing,* and finding by experience how liable it was to be abused, thought fit to give his Disciples a particular, and what may almost seem a *new,* precept, for their conduct in this respect. The ancient masters of rhetoric, and of morals, had frequently warned their scholars to take heed what *they speak*: but our Divine Master carries his attention still farther; and while his ministers are required, *to speak, as the oracles*

b 1 Cor. ix. 16.

*of God*, the people are very properly instructed by him, *to take heed what they hear.*

Now, that this admonition may have its full effect, it will be proper to explain the reasons, on which it is founded; to lay before you the several considerations which shew of what infinite concern it is to those, who *hear* the word, to be *attentive* in hearing.

And it naturally occurs, as the

I. First reason for this attention, that what is spoken, is delivered to them, *as the word of God.*

When a person in high place and authority thinks fit to honour us with a message, though it be in a matter of no great importance, with what submission is it received! How diligently do we listen to it! How circumspectly is every sentence, and even syllable, weighed! We do not stand to make exceptions to the messenger, who may have nothing in his own *person* to command our respect; we do not much consider the *grace* with which he delivers his message; we are not curious to observe in what *choice* or *elegant* terms it is expressed. We are only concerned to know, that the message

has been faithfully related, and then a due regard is immediately paid to it. And shall God speak to us by the mouth of his ministers, in terms which himself dictates, and which we may verify, if we please, by comparing them with his own *written word*,—shall, I say, the God of Heaven thus address himself to us, and we not *take heed what and how we hear?*

Or, suppose the opinion of a man learned in any secular profession is reported to us, on a point which falls within his province, and of which it concerns us to form a right apprehension, Is not such *opinion* received with respect by us, and studied with care?

And shall our Divine Master be negligently *heared*, when he condescends to instruct us in the way of life and salvation, a subject, of all others, the most interesting to us; a subject, which he alone perfectly understands, and concerning which he will not and cannot mislead us?

Still further, besides the authority of the divine word, there is something in the *nature* of it, which deserves, and, if we be not wholly insensible, must command our attention.

For shall a little superficial rhetorick be listened to with regard, perhaps with admiration?

And shall not the heart-felt truths of the Gospel warm and affect us? Shall a few spiritless periods, ranged in measure, and coloured with art, mere sound and paint, throw an assembly, sometimes, into joy or grief, or transport it with indignation? And can we lend a careless ear to the word of God, *which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* [c]?

Such is the attention due to the word of God, when *acknowledged* under that character. But

II. A SECOND reason for *hearing* with caution, is, that the hearers are required to judge for themselves whether what is delivered to them be, *indeed*, the word of God. Without this care, impostures may be endless, and the effect of them fatal.

When we give up ourselves with an implicit trust to others in mere temporal concerns, the mischief, although considerable, may yet be checked by experience; or, at most, as it re-

[c] Heb. iv. 12.

spects this life only, is not conclusive and irreparable: but in matters of religion, if we accept *that* as the word of God, and act upon it, which has no higher authority than the word of fallible and presumptuous men, we may be led into all the visions of fanaticism or superstition, and into all the crimes which so naturally spring from both, to the loss of our future, as well as present happiness.

It pleased God, therefore, from the time that miracles ceased to be the credentials of his ministers in the Christian Church, to secure the faithful from these dangers by the guidance of the *written Word*; in which, besides *special rules* there given for the trial of *the spirits, whether they are of God*, such *general principles* are delivered as may direct our judgment. And by the help of these, interpreted by the *tenor* of that word, and the *analogy* of faith, we may be secured from all deception or surprize.

It is true, all men cannot *apply* these rules and principles, or not with full knowledge and effect. Woe, therefore, be to him who abuses the incapacity of such hearers, by obtruding on their easy belief his own fancies, as the doctrines of God! But to the abler hearers of the

word, to all, indeed, who are competently instructed in their Religion, the task is not difficult to avoid gross and dangerous delusions, to determine for themselves *whether the doctrine be of God*, or not. This task, I say, is *not difficult*; yet it implies care and circumspection; and the necessity of discharging it must be allowed a good argument for *taking heed what we hear*.

III. A further reason for this diligence in *hearing* is, That the hearers are expected and required *to profit by the word spoken*.

*The word of wisdom and of knowledge is given to every man to profit withal*[d]. It is not a curious problem, a fine lecture, a trial of wit, or play of ingenuity, calculated to entertain us for the time, and to be laid aside and forgotten by us again, when the occasion is over. The ministry of the word is of another kind, and destined to higher purposes. It is an instrument of reproof, of exhortation, of instruction in righteousness. *The sword of the spirit* is put into the hands of men for no ends of pageantry and amusement. The minister

[d] 1 Cor. xii. 7.

of God *bears it not in vain.* He is entrusted with it to smite the hearts of the wicked, to *pierce through the souls* of unrighteous men, and to flash conviction in the face of unbelievers. It is an ordinance of God, by which he would humble the proud, and convert the obstinate; strengthen the weak, and confirm the wise, hearer. Whatever our condition, it is to be corrected or improved by the word of God; whatever our necessities, they are to be relieved by it. But every gift of the spirit, as well as faith, *cometh by hearing:* and that not in the instant, but by degrees; for the Gospel does not illuminate and sanctify men at once; but by successive improvements, according to the care with which we listen to its admonitions, and the impression they make upon us. Hence it concerns the hearer, that nothing be lost, and that *the good seed* be not committed to the ground in vain. One *truth* received, prepares the mind to entertain a second; that, a third; and so on, till we become perfect in the knowledge of the *faith.* Our moral advances are made in the same manner: one good resolution begets another, which again produces succeeding ones, till, through several intervening states, we arrive, or almost arrive, at perfect *obedience.*

And this consideration, indeed, seems to have been immediately present to our Lord, when he delivered the admonition in the text. For so he comments upon, and enforces his own words — *Take heed what ye hear:* [for] *with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you, and* TO YOU THAT HEAR, SHALL MORE BE GIVEN: that is, plainly and certainly, your proficiency in faith and virtue will depend upon the degree of attention ye pay to my word, and shall be proportioned to it; therefore it cannot be too strict and earnest. Nay, our Lord goes farther, and in his jealousy, as it were, for the honour of the word spoken, threatens the listless hearer, that he should not only not advance in religious qualifications, but that he should even lose those, which he already possessed. *For he that hath, to him shall be given:* AND HE THAT HATH NOT, FROM HIM SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY EVEN THAT HE HATH. And this dispensation of Providence, as severe as it may seem, is, I suppose, confirmed by too certain experience, and is analogous to the rest of God's moral government.

It is no slight matter then, *how we hear.* And let no idle prejudices prevent or mislead us. The preacher of the Gospel may, on va-

rious pretences, be unacceptable to us. Still, the Gospel itself is not *his*, but God's; to which no *circumstance* should indispose us. Nay, in spite of this indisposition, the *preacher*, if we resolve to hear, may profit us. For it is not, I conceive, without example, that such as come to amuse themselves with a stated discourse, or perhaps to censure the discourser, have found their hearts touched by the quickening power of the word, and have returned with serious thoughts and better resolutions.

This, I say, is not too much to expect from the Gospel of Christ, and the grace which attends it, since we find it recorded of a *Pagan moralist*, that, when a young reveller came into his school, flushed with wine, and (as the custom of such was) crowned with flowers, and therefore in no disposition, we may presume, to profit by his instructions; the philosopher, however, chose his topics so well, and pressed them on his gay disciple with such effect, as to send him away in a graver mood, and without his garland[e]. But,

[e] ——————— potus ut ille
Dicitur ex collo furtim carpsisse coronas,
Postquam est impransi correptus voce magistri.
Hor. 2. Sat. iii. 254.

IV. The last and most important reason of all why we should give an attentive ear to the word of God, is, *That we shall finally be judged by it.*

If the Gospel had only proposed to instruct us in the knowledge of God, that so we might speculate more ably on divine subjects; or, at most, refer the knowledge we acquire to present use; though it could not be denied that such purpose was an important one, yet, if it went no further, we might, if we could allow ourselves in such imprudence, make light of this, as we do of so many other kinds of instruction. We should be ignorant, indeed, and unaccomplished in a very sublime science; but so we are of many others, and yet are contented to remain in that ignorance. We might conduct ourselves foolishly and perversely, and might suffer much inconvenience, and even misery, for want of acting on the principles of this science; but so we do, in many other instances, for want of acting on the maxims of art and prudence in the management of our common concerns, and yet we make a shift to satisfy ourselves with our condition. But if the Gospel follow us into another world; if this immortal volume must be laid open in the presence of men and angels, and our eternal

doom pronounced out of it, though we would not obey, or so much as listen to its commands, when they were so earnestly, so repeatedly, in this life pressed upon us; if such be the effect of not *hearing*, how shall we excuse our indifference in this respect, or what can support us under the consciousness of it?

Hear then the awful sentence of Christ himself, denounced in that Gospel—*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him;* THE WORD *that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day*[f].

Go now, ye careless hearers, ye despisers of the WORD, and justify to yourselves, if ye can, your neglect and scorn of it!

When our Lord himself taught in the streets of Jerusalem, many a *superciliou*s Pharisee, we may suppose, passed by, without so much as stopping to hear what this divine teacher had to say to them: others, if they gave attention to his words, were only gratifying an idle, perhaps a malignant curiosity; they sought occasion from what he

[f] John xii. 48.

said to intrap him in his discourse, to accuse him to the rulers, or to vilify him in the eyes of the people. Again: when this same doctrine was taught by the Apostle Paul in another proud city, as proud of its philosophic schools, as Jerusalem was of its temple, many a contemptuous sophist, we may believe, disdained to listen at all to the *foolishness of preaching*; and of those few who did, *some*, we know, *mocked*, while others negligently asked their companions, *What would this babbler say?* But how will both these be astonished in the last day to find themselves judged by that *word* which they neglected, or contemned; by that word, which they would not *hear*, though it was brought home to their doors, or which they rejected with scorn, when they *did* hear it!

Nor think, because neither Jesus nor Paul hath preached in person to us, that therefore our case is much different. Jesus and Paul still speak in the ministers of the word: or, what if the speakers be widely different, the *word* is the same: *this treasure we* still *have*, though *in earthen vessels* g. Nay, in one respect, our guilt exceeds theirs. The Phari-

g 2 Cor. iv. 7.

sees and Philosophers were, alike, ignorant and unbelieving. We profess *to know*, and *to believe*.

Let us, then, *take heed what we hear*; lest our knowledge and belief add terrors to that day, when *the neglected word* shall sit in judgment upon us.

# SERMON XV.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 24, 1765.

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ROM. xvi. 19.

*I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*

OUR blessed Lord had given it in charge to his followers to be *wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*[a]. And the Apostle explains and enforces this command of his Master, when he enjoins us in the words of the text, To be *wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*

I confine myself, at present, to the former part of the text, and shall enquire into the properties or characters of CHRISTIAN WISDOM.

[a] Matth. x. 16.

This wisdom consists in the prosecution of what the Scriptures declare to be the true *end* of man, and by such *means* as they prescribe to us.

That *end* is the SALVATION of our souls; and the *means*, which lead to it, are FAITH and OBEDIENCE. Thus far there can be no mistake. The *wise Christian* is he who is intent on securing his *eternal* interest; and who, to that end, fortifies his mind with a firm belief of the *doctrines*, and conducts his life according to the *precepts*, of the Gospel.

I. But PERFECT WISDOM, which consists in a strict attention to these *several* particulars, and according to the true worth of *each*, is rarely the lot of human nature. And there are *two* ways, in which we are most apt to forfeit our pretensions to it. ONE is, when our minds, wholly taken up with the ultimate *object* of their hopes, neglect the *means* which are appointed to bring them to it: The OTHER, when we rest in the intervening *means* themselves, without a due regard to that *final purpose*, for the sake of which they were appointed.

1. The FORMER of these defects we may observe in those persons who, from a too warm and enthusiastic turn of thought, are for subliming all piety into the trances of mystic contemplation; as if *morality* and *faith* scarce deserved their notice; and the *beatific vision* were as well the *object*, as *end* of the Christian life. Here the fault lies in an impatience to come at the *point* we propose to ourselves, without observing the proper *methods* which are to put us in possession of it; and is much the same phrenzy as we should charge on those *travellers*, who, being on their way towards a distant country, stop short in the contemplation of all the wonders they have heard reported of it, without pursuing their journey, or indeed without taking one step towards it.

2. The OTHER defect of wisdom is seen in those less sanguine, and, in truth, lukewarm Christians, who do not, indeed, altogether neglect the subservient duties of their profession, but, as not enough considering the *prize of their high calling*, grow remiss in the exercise of them: in which they too much resemble those *same travellers*; who, when taking the ordinary means of arriving at their journey's end, fall into an idle way of loitering on the road, and use not that dispatch and diligence

in their stages, which an earnest consideration of the *end*, they have in view, should naturally inspire.

II. But this duty of Christian wisdom is further violated, when, with a full respect to our final *hopes and expectations*, and a general intention to pursue them by the *means* appointed in holy Scripture, we do not, however, observe the *due bounds and measures* of each; that is, when, of the *two* appointed means of salvation, *a pure faith*, and *right practice*, we chuse to ourselves a favourite, and incline too much to *one*, at the expence of the *other*. For,

1. With regard to the distinct provinces of FAITH and MORALITY, we know there are those, who, provided they are but sound and orthodox in their opinions, that they give an entire assent to the several articles of their creed, and submit their faith to the entire direction of Scripture, or perhaps of the church with which they communicate, suppose the affair of *moral practice* of much less importance; and conclude their devotion for this acceptable sacrifice of *a right faith* will excuse their making somewhat too free with the article of *obedience*. Such persons there have been and still are in

all churches; but we know *what* sect of Christians is most deeply infected with this error.

2. On the contrary, they who have shaken off this bondage of superstition, and have observed the mischiefs which arise in abundance from this exclusive attachment to creeds and confessions, are very apt to run into the other extreme; and, because they find *morality* to be of eternal obligation, make the less account of *faith* and right opinion. As the former excess is the peculiar disgrace of *Popery*, this other has frequently been objected to *Protestantism*. *Both* are manifest violations of *Christian wisdom*; which, besides that it commands an equal reverence for the two tables of the divine law, should further instruct us, *that as faith without works is vain*, so *good works* themselves, unassisted and unsanctified by *faith*, are either not so perfect, or not so acceptable from us Christians, as otherwise they might be. Not to observe, that as the articles of our holy faith may be founded on *reasons*, which we do not know; so the belief or rejection of them may have *consequences*, which we cannot foresee.

III. And with this preparation, let us now descend to still more particular reflexions on

the duty which lies upon us to approve our *wisdom* in the *public profession* of that faith, and the *manifestation* of that practice. *Christian wisdom* requires an attentive regard to the main *end* we have in view, and to the *methods* by which we are instructed to obtain it. But still there is great room for discretion to shew itself in the *management and pursuit* of those methods. One *manner* of doing the good, we are appointed to do, will be preferable to another. And it is a great part of Christian prudence to be ready and expert in discovering and acting upon that *preference*. This indeed is a large field; nor is it possible to enumerate all the cases which fall within this province of true wisdom. But to prescribe to ourselves some plan, however defective, we may consider, that, if a constant regard be had to *ourselves*, to our *own character and circumstances*, our virtues will then be most GRACEFUL; if to the exigencies of the *times* and *places* in which we live, most SEASONABLE; and, lastly, if to the *persons, conditions*, and *characters* of other men, they will thus become most ATTRACTIVE and EFFICACIOUS.

1. It was a point the masters of ancient wisdom took a singular pleasure to inculcate, and we find an equal stress laid upon it by the sa-

cred writers, that a strict *decorum* be observed in the exercise of our virtues; or, in other words, that the *good* we do be that which is *fit* and *decent*, considering our *circumstances and characters*. Thus we find one set of duties more especially recommended to the *young*, another to the *aged*; some to *private* persons, others to such as are in *place and authority*. Different *professions* in life have also different sets of offices belonging to them; or in such as are *common* to all, propriety demands, that they be evidenced in very different *manners*. The virtues we expect in the *poor man*, are humility, industry, and resignation. These too are virtues, from the obligation of which no *rich man* is exempted; but it would be strangely *misbecoming*, if *he* did not surpass the *other* in acts of charity and beneficence. And in respect of the same *common* virtue, suppose *charity*, what the *one* would very commendably discharge by little acts of service and assiduity towards his distressed neighbour, might require a very considerable expence of wealth or labour in the *other*. Nay, the several humours and dispositions of men will occasion a difference, if not in the *matter* of their duty, yet in the *way* in which it will become them to express it. An eminent moralist, indeed, carried this point of *decorum* very far when he would jus-

articles and superstitious ceremonies; when Popery had enslaved both mind and body, had bent the *one* to an implicit acquiescence in the doctrines of the Church, and burthened the *other* with a constant unprofitable exercise of its worship. How then was the *wisdom* of a good man to express itself in these circumstances? In dispelling, it will surely be said, the gloom of superstition; in asserting the great privileges of natural reason, and in pressing the obligation and necessity of a good life, as of more worth than all ceremonial observances.

This *was* the service rendered by the best men of those days to true Religion; and *we* have reason to bless and revere their memories for it. But should the liberty into which we are called, degenerate into licentiousness; should it ever be common for men, in the fear of *believing* too much, not to believe what the Scriptures themselves plainly require of them; and from the apprehension of relapsing into their old superstitious practices, to give little or no regard to the duties of external worship: should this at any time be the case, those truly wise men, who laboured so profitably to check the *other* extreme, would certainly, in this dif-

consideration. But when the question is, how we may do the *most* good by our religious or moral conduct, a prudent accommodation of ourselves to time and place will be very necessary.[c]. The primitive Christians were not *wise unto that which is good*, when they provoked the cruelty of their enemies, and offered themselves without cause to the racks and fires of persecution. Nor would *they* be less blameable, who, in a careless, prophane age, when *silence* would be readily taken for *assent*; when, not to profess the faith would be construed to renounce it, should, from a too scrupulous fear of giving offence, forbear to make an open confession of their religion. The exigencies of *times*, we see, are very different. A wise man would have endeavoured to moderate the excessive zeal, which prevailed in the *former* of these periods: he would apply himself to raise and quicken it, were he to find himself in the circumstances described in the *latter*. Or, to explain myself by a case which may still more nearly affect us. There was a *time*, when the religion of our country consisted too much in a zeal for unintelligible

c See the Story of Musonius Rufus in Tacitus, Hist. L. iii. c. 81.

cretion, and can never be attended with any good consequences. Were *we* ever so able to instruct, or were *they* ever so much in want of instruction, *prudence* would suggest a very different conduct. It would recommend to us all the honest arts of insinuation and address; it would oblige us to watch the fittest seasons and opportunities; or, perhaps, to content ourselves with the silent admonition of a good example. Or, were there nothing in the *rank and condition* of those we would work upon, to restrain us to this caution, we might even be required to shew a condescension to their very *prejudices and humours*. The errors of men may sometimes be removed by arguing with them on their own mistaken principles; by allowing all that truth and reason will warrant to their opinions; by putting the fairest construction upon their designs; by hinting objections to their wrong tenets, instead of fiercely declaiming against them; above all, by testifying a sincere disposition to advance truth and goodness, without any indirect views to our own interest. Or, were all other considerations out of the case, we could never be excused from proceeding in the way of gentleness and civility, from treating them with due respect, and expressing the sincerest good-will to their

*persons.* Be their *moral* or *religious* defects what they will, we should hardly be *wise;* that is, we should take very improper methods of reclaiming them from *either,* if we reproved with bitterness, advised with insolence, or condemned with passion. In all addresses to mistaken or bad men, where our purpose is to inform or amend them, the gentlest *applications* are surely the best, because *these* excite no passion to counteract their *virtue.*

And now, at length, should it be asked who is that WISE CHRISTIAN whom the text designs and recommends to our imitation, we are able to furnish, at least, the outline of his character.

"HE is one who sets before him the great END and prize of his *high calling;* who, in his progress through the various stages of *this* life, keeps in constant view the immortal happiness which his religion holds out in prospect to him in *another:* who, in humble adoration of his God and Saviour, is content to wait the appointed season which is to crown his hopes and expectations; and, for the present, is sollicitous to *work out his salvation with fear* and reverence, by an earnest application of his

time and pains to those *subservient duties*, which are to qualify him for the enjoyment of Heaven; who subjects all the towering conceits of his *understanding*, to the *doctrines* of the Gospel, and the impetuous sallies of his *will*, to the *precepts* of it; who makes no audacious separation of what the wisdom of God hath joined together; but, whilst he adores the mysteries of his holy FAITH, walks on in the plain and humble path of moral OBEDIENCE. He is *one*, who thinks it not enough to rest in the mere MATTER of his duty, but performs it in such a MANNER as will render it most exemplary and efficacious. He knows it to be a great precept of his religion, to see, *that his good be not evil spoken of*. He would not disgrace the *best* cause in the world by the neglect of those decencies, which, as he observes, have sometimes the strange power to recommend the *worst*. The good he intends, therefore, is attempted in such a way, as is most BECOMING of himself; most SEASONABLE in respect of the opportunities which are offered to him; and most agreeable and PERSUASIVE to other men. In short, HE is one who, taking *Prudence* for his guide, and *Innocence* for his companion, thinks himself secure in these attendants; and therefore neglects no

*decorum*, which the best philosophy prescribes; no *art*, which the soundest policy suggests; and no *address*, which the politest manners recommend: and so, in the high emphatic sense of the words, approves himself a WISE MAN; *wise unto that which is good*, to all purposes in *this* world, as well as in a *better*."

# SERMON XVI.

PREACHED DECEMBER 1, 1765.

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ROM. xvi. 19.

*I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*

IN considering the first part of this precept, I endeavoured to give some general description of Religious or CHRISTIAN WISDOM; both in respect of the END it has in view, and of the MEANS employed by it: I further exemplified some of those subordinate WAYS, in which the prudent application even of those *means* is seen and expressed: And all this, for the sake of those sincere, but over-zealous persons, who

are apt to think that *wisdom* hath little to do in the prosecution of honest and upright purposes.

It now remains to treat that other part of the text, which requires us to be INNOCENT, as well as *wise*, to be SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL. And this, perhaps, will be thought the more important branch of the subject. For, generally speaking, the ways of *wisdom*, when our purposes are the very best, are not only the most effectual, but the safest and most convenient. So that *prudence* is likely to be a favourite virtue with us. But the case is different with regard to *simplicity concerning evil*; which is often found a hard and disagreeable injunction; as it may happen to cross our passions and the more immediate views of self-interest. So that this SIMPLICITY will sometimes seem, what the world is ready enough to call it, *folly*: and therefore, for the credit of our *sense*, as well as virtue, we should be well apprized of the worth and excellence of this Christian duty.

The virtue of SIMPLICITY consists, in general, in following the plain ingenuous sense of the mind; in taking our measures according to the dictates of conscience, and acting, on all occasions, without reserve, duplicity, or self-

imposture, up to our notions of obligation. It is the office of WISDOM to see that our conscience be rightly informed: But our INTEGRITY is shewn in doing that which conscience, be it erroneously informed or no, requires of us. It consists, in a word, in whatever we understand by an *honesty of nature;* in observing, universally, that which we believe to be *right*, and avoiding what we know, or but suspect [a] to be *wrong*.

This *simplicity of mind* may be almost said to be born with us. It is the bias of nature on our young minds; and our earliest instructions, as well as the first efforts of reason, strengthen and confirm it. But the impression lasts not long. We are scarcely entered into life, when we begin to treat it as one of *those childish things,* which it is beneath the dignity of our riper age to be amused with. The passions put forth and grow luxuriant; and why, we say to ourselves, should this tender apprehension of evil check their growth, and restrain their activity? We are now in the season

[a] Bene præcipiunt, qui vetant quidquam agere, quod dubites, æquum sit an iniquum: æquitas enim lucet ipsa per se; dubitatio cogitationem significat injuriæ.

Cic. de Off. L. I. ix.

of *pleasure;* and can there be any hurt in taking a little of it, out of that narrow path, which our early prejudices have prescribed to us?

Still, as we advance in years, fresh objects arise, and other passions engage us in the pursuit of them. Wealth and honour, or what we improperly call our *interests,* have now an ascendant over us; and the passion for each is rarely gratified but at the expence of some virtue. And thus it comes to pass, that, though we set out in the world with a warm sense of truth and honour, experience by degrees refines us out of these principles; and our hearts, instead of retaining that *infant* purity, the grace and ornament of our nature, and which Christ so especially requires[b] in the professors of his religion, are all over stained with fraud, dissimulation, and disingenuity. We are even proud of the acquisition, and call it a *knowledge of life:* so dextrous are we in giving a good name to our worst qualities!

But effects follow their causes; and the vice we are now considering is not the less opera-

[b] Matth. v. 8.

tive, nor the less hurtful, for the specious terms in which we dress it up, and present it to each other.

Of its malignity I shall give two or three instances; and, to fit them the better for use, they shall be taken from very different quarters; from the *cabinets of the wise, and the schools of the learned*, as well as from the *vulgar haunts of careless and licentious men*. We shall learn, perhaps, to reverence the Apostle's advice, when we find that the neglect of it has DEGRADED RELIGION; RELAXED MORALITY, and POLLUTED COMMON LIFE.

To begin with an instance which shews how dangerous it is to depart from this *simplicity concerning evil*, in the great concerns of RELIGION.

I. When the priest, the sage, and the politician joined together in the days of heathenism to propagate among the people a superstition, which themselves condemned and detested; when they did their utmost to support a senseless, an immoral, an irreligious worship; when they strove, by every seducing artifice, to keep up that strong delusion, which God, in his just indignation, had sent among them, to

believe a *lye*, (for such in its whole fabric and constitution was the old Pagan idolatry) when these men, who *knew the truth*, were yet contented *to hold it in unrighteousness*; they believed, no doubt, nay, they made no scruple to boast, that they had acted with consummate prudence; and that, in sacrificing the interests of religious truth (a small matter in their estimation) they had most effectually provided for the public interest. But what sentence does the Scripture pass on these men of ancient and renowned wisdom? Why this severe and mortifying one, That *professing themselves wise, they became fools*. And how well they deserved this censure, we understand from their own history; where we read, That Pagan idolatry, thus countenanced and supported, teemed with all the vices, of which our depraved nature is capable; and that the several contrivances of its wise advocates to keep an impious and barefaced falshood in credit, served only to produce, *first*, a SUSPICION, and in the *end*, an open and avowed CONTEMPT, of all Religion.

However, the ends of *divine wisdom* were greatly promoted by this sad experience of *human folly*. For Christianity, which made its appearance at this juncture, found it an easier

task to establish itself on the ruins of a fallen, or falling superstition. *Truth*, which had for so long a time been anxiously kept out of sight, was now the more welcome to those, who wished her appearance. And the detection of those prophane arts, which had been so manifestly employed in that service, disposed the most perverse or careless the more easily to reconcile themselves to her.

And it would have been happy if the sense of this advantage, which the *simplicity of truth* obtained, in the first ages of the Gospel, over all the frauds of imposture, had prevented Christians from copying afterwards what they had so successfully contended against and exposed. Then had a great dishonour of the Christian name been avoided. But that *truth*, whose virtues are here magnified, must not be dissembled. The practice of *lying* for the cause of God, too soon revived, and became too frequent in the Christian world. It is in vain to think of diverting your minds, more especially, from that great part of it, which has long since forgotten to be *simple concerning evil*. But true *wisdom will ever be justified of her children*. These dishonest arts, which could not support a bad cause, have been injurious and disgraceful to the *best*. They have

corrupted the ingenuous spirit of the Gospel, they have adulterated the sincere word of God; and, in both ways, have produced innumerable mischiefs, in civil and religious life. They have helped to bring into discredit or disuse a true *Christian temper;* and have unhappily created in the minds of many an undeserved prejudice against the *Christian faith.*

II. But if these men have dishonoured *Religion,* others have defiled MORALITY; yet both assume to themselves the title of *wise* men; and for that very reason, because they have departed as far as possible from the virtue of *simplicity.*

And here your indignation cannot but rise more especially against a set of men, who, applying the subtleties of school-philosophy to the plain science of Ethics, have made as free with the *precepts* of the Gospel, as some others had done with its *doctrines.* These men, under the respectable name of CASUISTS, have presumed to wind up, or let down the obligation of moral duties to what pitch they please. Such as have taken the STRICTER side, deserve but small thanks for perplexing the minds of good men with needless scruples; and discouraging the rest with those austerities, which our Religion

no where commands, and the condition of human life will not admit. But for that *looser sort*, who by a thousand studied evasions, qualifications, and distinctions, dissolve the force of every moral precept; and, as the Pharisees of old, *make the word of God of none effect* by their impious glosses, I know not what term of reproach you will think bitter enough for *them*. The sacred writers thought it sufficient to deliver the rules of life in *general* terms [c]; leaving it, as they well might, to common sense and common honesty, to make the application of them to *particular* cases, as they chanced to arise. But this officious sophistry intervening and perverting the ingenuous sense of the mind, instructs us how to transgress them all with impunity, and even innocence. By the help of this magic, we may extract the sting of guilt from every known sin; and, if we have but wit enough, may be as wicked as we please with a safe conscience.

[c] To the same purpose, Seneca, of the old heathen philosophers: "Antiqua sapientia," says he, "nihil aliud, quàm FACIENDA et VITANDA, præcepit: et tunc longè meliores erant viri: postquam docti prodierunt, boni desunt. Simplex enim illa et aperta virtus in obscuram et solertem scientiam versa est, docemurque disputare, non vivere." Senec. Ep. xcv.

If the features of this corrupt casuistry have not been overcharged; or, indeed, if there be any such thing in the world as a corrupt casuistry, it may concern us to reflect, that this pest of society could not have arisen but from a contempt of the Apostle's rule, *of being simple concerning evil.*

III. Hitherto we have exemplified the breach of this rule in the *learned,* and the *wise.* And it may be thought that nothing but perverted science could qualify men for so prodigious a depravity. But there is a casuistry of *the heart,* as well as head; and we find by woeful experience, that men may refine themselves out of that *simplicity* which the Gospel enjoins, without the assistance of *unblessed knowledge.*

For I come now, in the last place, to instance in the vulgar tribes of *libertine and careless men.* Of whom we may observe, that when indulged passion has taught them to make light of an honest mind; the consequence is, that they run into all excesses, and are rarely hindered from *working all uncleanness with greediness.* It is true, indeed, that no man becomes at once desperately and irretrievably wicked. But it is not less true, that when this great step is taken of prevaricating

with a man's own conscience, the other stages of iniquity are presently passed over. And how indeed can it be otherwise? So long as a man preserves the integrity of his natural disposition, there is always hope that, though particular passions may prevail for a time, reason and virtue will, in the end, regain their dominion over him. At least, he will be constantly checked and kept back in the career of his vices. But when this sincerity of heart is lost; when he confounds the differences of right and wrong, palliating the deformities of vice, or bestowing on vice itself the attractions of virtue; then all reasonable expectation of a return is cut off; since this perverted ingenuity tends to make him easy under his sins, and leaves him at leisure to pursue his evil courses with security.

We see then from the excesses into which these different sorts of men have been led, by the refinements of POLICY, of ABUSED SCIENCE, and DELUSIVE PASSION, how dangerous it is to bid adieu to that *simplicity concerning evil*, which the Holy Apostle requires of us.

It remains, that we cannot provide too cautiously against those evasive PLEAS AND PRETENCES, which would incline us to part with it.

These PRETENCES are infinite: for, when the *heart* is corrupted, the *understanding* is ready to pander to every lust that importunes it. But we may know the principal of them by these signs. To be *simple concerning evil* is the easiest thing in the world; but we may suspect that something *wrong* is ready to intrude itself, "WHEN we cast about for excuses to cover the nakedness of ingenuity; when we are driven to distinctions and far-fetched reasoning for our justification; when we pause a moment between the clear conviction of duty, on one hand, and any indirect views on the other; more *particularly*, WHEN we find the tone of our virtue relax at the consideration of what we may chance to lose by adhering to it; when we but suspect, that a severe unqualifying virtue looks like inhumanity; when we think our dependencies and connexions in life have a demand upon conscience; when we lament with the politician, that *good men are impracticable*, and so, from a principle of public spirit, resolve not to encounter that prejudice: Above all, when we go about to regulate morality by what *a knowledge of the world* teaches; when *custom* is pleaded in opposition to *duty*, and vice itself authorized by

*fashion*[d]; when we acknowledge what we do is in itself not justifiable, but excuse it by a pretence of the good ends we hope to serve by it; when we are willing to plead the infirmity of nature, the power of temptation, the prevalence of example; when we venture too securely on the confines of immorality, and are curious to know how near we may go to vice, without being directly vicious."

These, and such as these, are the dangerous insinuations which attempt our virtue. And how, you will ask, shall we secure ourselves from them? By reason and argument? By speculation and philosophy? Shall we stay to examine their several pretences, call these delusive pleas to account, and shew we can confute them all, before we reject them?

Alas, I dare not advise this method; which besides its other inconveniencies, is not, I doubt, a very safe one. Our heads may be unequal to the task; or, which is worse, our hearts may betray us. At the best, we shall waste much time in these ingenious inquiries, when the business of life demands an immediate

[c] Corrumpere et corrumpi, *sæculum* vocatur. Tacitus.

determination. St. Paul has shewn us a shorter and *more excellent way*, when he bids us, *Be simple concerning evil*. In virtue of this sacred admonition, a wise man will think it sufficient to dismiss these vain insinuations at once, without so much as spending a thought upon them. "What," he will say to himself, "if I cannot detect the falsehood of these pleas, "I have a *heart*, that revolts against them. "I cannot, perhaps, disentangle the sophistry "of these arguments; but I *feel* the base-"ness of the conclusion, and I *see* in others "the folly of acting upon it. It were ill with "*vice* indeed, if it had no false colours to ap-"pear in; and *error* would be hooted out of "the world, if she did not hide her obliquities "under the garb of reason. But what are "these disguises to me, who am neither "dazzled by the one, nor duped by the other? "Let the curious, if they will, inquire, wherein "the imposture consists: I have that within "me, which tells me in a moment, they are "but impostures. In vain then, will such a "one conclude, are these insiduous attempts "on me, who take a sure refuge in the word "of God, and the integrity of my own virtue. "Be the pretences what they will, the con-"futation of them is no part of a Christian's "care. I may exercise my understanding

"profitably in other matters. It is my duty
"to consider much of the ways of *doing good*.
"I may be prudent and WISE here. But, EX-
"PERIENCE, and CONSCIENCE, and RELIGION,
"command me to be, SIMPLE CONCERNING
"EVIL."

# SERMON XVII.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 22, 1772.

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JOHN V. 44.

*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?*

IT has been thought unfair to charge unbelief, simply and indiscriminately, on the grosser passions. The observation, I believe, is just: and yet it may be true, notwithstanding, that unbelief is always owing to *some or other* of the passions. The evidences of revealed religion are so numerous, and upon the whole so convincing, that one cannot easily conceive

how a reasonable man should reject them all, without the intervention of some secret prejudice, or predominant affection.

Of these *prejudices and affections*, one of the commonest, and the most seducing of any to the better sort of unbelievers, is that irregular love of *praise and reputation*, which our Lord condemns in the text—*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

The question, we may observe, is so expressed, as if we *could not* receive honour from one another, and believe, at the same time; as if there was a physical, at least a moral impossibility, that these two things should subsist together. And we shall find, perhaps, the expression no stronger than the occasion required, if, besides other considerations, we attend to the following; which shew how inconsistent a true practical faith in the Gospel is with the sollicitous and undistinguishing pursuit of human glory.

For, I. *The Gospel* delivers many of its doctrines as inscrutable, and silences the busy curiosity of our understandings about them:

but the *honour of men* is frequently obtained by indulging this curiosity, and pushing the researches of reason into those forbidden quarters.

II. *The Gospel* demands an humble and reverential awe in the discussion of all its doctrines; such of them, I mean, as it leaves most free to human inquiry: but this turn of mind is contrary to that high courage and daring intrepidity, which the *world* expects in those who are candidates for its honour.

III. *The Gospel* prescribes an uniform and unqualified assent to whatever it declares of divine things, whether we can or cannot apprehend the reason of such declaration: but this submission to authority, the *world* is ready to call ill-faith, and to consider the defiance of it, as a mark of superior honesty and virtue.

Thus we see, that WIT, COURAGE, and PROBITY, the three great qualities we most respect in ourselves, and for which we receive the highest honour from each other, appear many times to the world with less advantage in the Christian, than the unbeliever. Not, that Christianity strips us of these virtues: on the

other hand, it requires and promotes them all, in the proper sense of the words; and they may really subsist in a higher degree in the *believer*, than any other: but they will often seem to be more triumphantly displayed by those who give themselves leave to *disbelieve*; and the prospect of honour, which that opinion opens to such men, is one of the commonest sources from which they derive their infidelity.

But to make good this charge against the unbelieving world, and to lay open the mysteries of that insidious self-love, which prompts them to aspire to *fame*, by the means of infidelity, it will be necessary to resume the THREE TOPICS before mentioned, and to enlarge something upon each of them.

I. FIRST, then, I say, That He, who at all adventures resolves to obtain the honour of men, *cannot believe*, because the unrestrained exercise of his WIT, by which he would acquire that honour, is inconsistent with the genius and principles of our religion.

The fundamental articles of the Gospel are proposed to us, as objects of faith, not as subjects of inquiry. As they proceed from the

source of light and truth, they are founded, no doubt, in the highest reason; but they are for the most part, at least in many respects, inscrutable to our reason. It is enough that we see cause to admit the revelation itself, upon the evidences given of it: it is not necessary that we should carry our researches any farther. It is not safe, or decent, or practicable, in many cases, to do it. The just and sober reasoner is careful to proceed on clear and distinct ideas, and to stop where these fail him. But how soon does he arrive at this point? For the sublime genius of Christianity reminds him, at almost every step, how impossible it is, with the scanty line of human reason, to fathom the *deep things of God;* and represses the sallies of his wit and fancy, with this reflexion — *how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* In a word, where he finds the subject too obscure for his understanding to penetrate, or too vast for his ideas to comprehend (and he presently finds this, when he attempts to reason on the mysteries of the Christian faith) he checks his inquiries, he believes, and adores in silence.

But now this silence, this adoration, is ill suited to the restless ambition of the human mind, when it aspires to the reputation of pro-

found and extensive knowledge. The vain reasoner would signalize himself on all subjects, the most abstruse and mysterious, in preference to others; and fears not to carry his presumptuous inquiries to the seat and throne of God. He questions the revealed truths of the Gospel as freely as any other; and finding them many times inexplicable by the principles of human science, he triumphs in the discovery, applauds his own reach of thought, and dazzles the world into a high opinion of his wit and parts. The truth is, he decides on subjects, which he does not, and cannot understand: but the world sees, he decides upon them; and that is generally enough to attract its admiration and esteem.

Again: In such parts of revealed Religion, as lie more within the cognizance of human reason, an inquirer may find difficulties, and start objections, which the best instructed believer either does not attempt, or is not able to resolve. Here, the triumph of wit over faith is thought conspicuous, and is indeed seducing. For, while the believer has only to confess his own ignorance, the infidel shines in exposing and inforcing those difficulties and objections: And, when the ingenuity is all on one side, it is rarely suspected, that reason and good sense may be, with modesty, on the other.

Nay, where the point in question can be effectually cleared up, still there will generally seem to be more acuteness in discovering a difficulty, than in removing it: And thus the subtle caviller in religious controversy shall have the fortune to pass for a shrewder man, than the ablest apologist.

And that this advantage of reputation is, indeed, that which free and libertine reasoners propose to themselves, you will see by calling to mind the sort of subjects, which they are fondest to treat, and the sort of character, which they are most proud to assume.

In natural religion, the origin of evil, and God's moral government, are their favourite topics: in revealed religion, the fall of human nature, its restoration by the death and sufferings of Christ, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the adorable Trinity. But why are these high subjects picked out to exercise their speculations upon? subjects, in which the sublimest understanding is absorbed and lost; subjects, which they well know (for I speak of the abler men in that party) we have no faculties to comprehend. Why, then, are these subjects preferred to all others? For an obvious cause: to shew how ingenious they can

be in perplexing human reason, if any believer should be indiscreet enough to subject these mysterious truths to that test.

But the character, they assume, declares their purpose no less than the arguments they delight to treat. For their pride is to affect a sort of pyrrhonism, or universal doubt and hesitation, even on the plainest points of morals; to controvert the most received principles and opinions; and, as the sophists of old, *to make the worse appear the better reason*, in all questions which they undertake to discuss. Would you desire a stronger proof of the principle which actuates such men?

II. It appears, then, how the ostentation *of wit* leads to infidelity. The affectation of COURAGE is another snare to those, who lie in wait for the honour of men.

The believer, it has been observed, presumes not to reason at all on some points of his Religion. In others, he is left at liberty; yet on these, he reasons, always with great reverence and circumspection. Now, though this conduct be highly fit and proper, it is not so likely to strike the observation of men, as a more forward and enterprizing behaviour. Not

only his understanding is restrained, but his spirit, they say, is cramped and broken. The inconsiderate world, on the other hand, is taken with bold assertions, and hazardous positions; which it easily construes into a mark of high courage, as well as capacity. A fearless turn of mind is a dazzling quality, and we do not always distinguish between intrepidity and temerity. Thus it comes to pass, that as the Christian's love of peace and charity in common life, so his cautious respect in religious matters, has been treated by libertine men, as pusillanimity. He is considered, in the fashionable world, as a tame and spiritless man; and in the learned world, as a tame and spiritless reasoner.

Hence, when we are bent, at any rate, upon *receiving honour one of another*, we are tempted to make a display, not of our wit only, but our courage: And, as nothing is thought a surer indication of this quality, than to make light of that which the rest of the world hold sacred, we easily see how a passion for this sort of fame betrays the unbalanced mind into all the extravagancies of infidelity.

The instances are frequent, and well-known. When the Philosopher of Malmsbury, in the last century, took upon him to resolve all

morality and all religion into the will of the magistrate, whatever other end he might have in view, the bold singularity of this paradox was, no doubt, that which chiefly recommended it to himself, as well as surprized the world into an opinion of his bravery: though we know, from his story, that, in fact, he had no more of this virtue, than might well have consisted with faith, and the fear of God. But vain man oft affects to make a shew of that which he does not possess: and thus his defect in true courage, may be the true account of his pretending to so much of it.

Still, the heart of man is more deceitful, than we have hitherto seen, or can easily believe: For who,

III. In the last place, would suspect, that an admiration of INTEGRITY itself, as well as of *wit* and *courage*, should seduce the unwary mind into irreligion? Yet so it is, that men, intoxicated with the love of fame, will sacrifice any virtue, the best quality they have, to the reputation of it.

The true believer admits, with a full and perfect assent, whatever he takes to be clearly revealed in the Gospel; the most impenetrable article of his creed, as well as the simplest pro-

position in morals. All stands with him on the same equal footing of divine authority: no matter, whether he can, or cannot, perceive the grounds of reason, on which the Revelation is founded.

But now this facility of belief, this entire resignation of the understanding to the dictates of Heaven, the world is ready to suspect, of disingenuity. And they who live only in the opinion of that world, would not be exposed to so dishonourable a suspicion.

The process of their vanity may be traced in this manner. They have observed, that some persons (of their acquaintance, it may be) pretend to more faith than they have. They suppose the same thing of many others; and they suppose too, the rest of the world, the more intelligent part of it at least, are in the same opinion. But they pique themselves on their honesty: they will give no man leave to call in question their good faith; the ornament of their lives, and the idol of their hearts. And thus, as many men are ill-bred, for fear of passing in the world for flatterers; so these men are unbelievers, that they may not be accounted hypocrites.

As extravagant as this turn of mind appears, it cannot be thought incredible; especially when united, as it may be, with that pride of understanding, and courage, before mentioned. "It is not for *me*, (says a presuming inquirer to himself) who am distinguished by a reach of thought and penetration from the vulgar, to admit, without scruple, so extraordinary a system, as that of Revelation. I must doubt and disbelieve, where others see nothing to stop at. Nor is it for a man of my spirit to endure those shackles of reserve and respect, which oppress the timid and servile believer. Above all, it becomes the honesty, I profess, to take no part of my religion upon trust; an easy submission to what is called authority, is, with discerning men, but another name for insincerity. As I tender, then, the reputation of my *wit*, my *courage*, and my *integrity*, it concerns me to take heed how I entertain a belief; which may, at once, shake the credit of all these virtues."

This train of sophistry, you see, is not ill laid; and one conceives how a mind, transported with the love of false honour, may be caught by it.

At first, perhaps, the disbelief is *pretended*, only. But pretences[a], continued for any time, become *realities*. And thus, what was assumed, to give us the credit of certain virtues with the world, or with that part of it to which we desire to recommend ourselves, is at length embraced with a sort of good faith; and we are, what we have seemed to be, at the instance indeed of our vanity, but, as we flatter ourselves, for the sake of those very virtues.

Something like this, which I have here described, may have been the case of a well-known philosopher, who would be thought to crown his other parts of ingenuity and courage, with the purest probity[b]. This unhappy man, having published to the world an offensive system of infidelity, and being called to account for it, replies to his censurer in these words — *The world may calumniate me, as it sees fit; but it shall never take from me the honour of being the only author of this age, and of many others, who hath written with good faith*[c].

a Frequens imitatio transit in mores. Quinctil. L. I. c. XI.

b *Vitam impendere vero.* His motto.

c Mes ennemies auront beau fair avec leurs injures; ils ne m'ôteront point l'honneur d'être un homme veridique

What shall we say of this strange boast? Was it enthusiasm, or the pride of virtue, that drew it from him? This *honest* man, we will say, might believe himself, when he talked at this rate: but then we must conclude, that nothing but the most intemperate love of praise could have wrought him up to so frantic a persuasion.

I suppose, it may now appear how easily we become the dupes of any favourite passion; and how perfect an insight our Lord had into the nature of man, when he asserted in the text—*that we cannot believe, if we will receive honour one of another. We cannot*, you see, *believe*; because, if that honour be the ultimate end and scope of our ambition, the best faculties we possess, the fairest virtues of our hearts, will pervert, and, in a manner, force us into infidelity.

Let this humiliating consideration have its full effect upon us. Above all, let it check, or rather regulate that ardent desire of fame, which is so predominant in young and inge-

en toute chose, *d'être le seul auteur de mon siecle, & de beaucoup d'autres, qui ait ecrit de bonne foi.*

Rousseau, Lettre à M. de Beaumont.

nuous minds. Let such learn from it to mistrust their passions, even the most refined and generous, when they would inquire into the evidences of their religion. Let them remember that *reason*, pure impartial reason, is to direct them in this search; that the passion for honour is in all cases, but particularly in this (where it is so seducing) an unsafe and treacherous guide; and that, to escape the illusions of infidelity and a thousand other illusions, to which they will otherwise be exposed in common life, one certain method will be, To controul their love of fame, by the love of truth; which is, in other words, *to seek the honour, that cometh of God, only*.

# SERMON XVIII.

PREACHED APRIL 23, 1769.

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JOHN, ix. 41.

*Jesus saith to them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth.*

THESE words were spoken by our Lord on occasion of a great miracle performed by him, in restoring a man *born blind* to his sight. This wonderful display of power had its natural effect on the man himself, in converting him to the faith of Jesus; while the Pharisees, who had the fullest evidence laid before them of the *fact*, persisted obstinately in their infidelity. Yet the *blind* man, on whom this

miracle had been wrought, was one of those whom the Pharisees accounted *blind* in understanding, also; in other words, he was a plain unlettered man; whereas they themselves were *guides to the blind*, that is, they pretended to a more than ordinary knowledge of the law and the prophets, by which they were enabled to conduct and enlighten others.

Jesus, therefore, respecting at once his late restoration of the blind man's *sight*, and the different effects of that miracle on the *minds* of the two parties, applies, with singular elegance, to himself, the famous prediction of Isaiah — *For judgment*, says he, *am I come into this world, that they, which see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind.* The Pharisees were, indeed, sharp-sighted enough to perceive the drift of this application, and therefore said to him, in the same figurative language, *Are we blind also?* To whom Jesus replied in the words of the text, *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth.* As if he had said, "If ye were indeed ignorant of the law and the prophets, as ye account this poor man to be, ye might have some excuse for not believing in *me*, who appeal to that law and those prophets for the proof of my

mission; but being so skilled in them, as ye are, and profess yourselves to be, ye are clearly convicted of a willful, and therefore criminal, infidelity."

It is implied, we see, in this severe reproof of the Pharisees, that knowledge and faith very well consist together, or rather that, where *knowledge* is, there *faith* must needs be, unless a very perverse use be made of that knowledge.

But to this decision of our Lord, the unbelieving world is ready to oppose its own maxims. "It sees so little connexion between *faith* and *knowledge*, that it rather concludes them to be incompatible: It allows the ignorant, indeed, who cannot *walk by sight*, to *walk by faith*; but, as for the knowing and intelligent, the men of science and understanding, it presumes, that *faith* cannot be required of these; and that, BECAUSE *they see*, it is too much to expect of them, *to believe in Jesus*."

It is true, the persons, who speak thus slightly of *faith*, are not the most distinguished in the world by their own parts, or knowledge. But a certain mediocrity of *both*, inflated by vanity, and countenanced by fashion, is forward to in-

dulge in this free language; and the mischief done by it to Religion, is so great, that it may not be amiss to expose, in few words, the indecency and folly of it.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE, then, it is said, are at variance with each other. Why? The answer, I suppose, will be, Because *faith* is in itself *unreasonable;* in other words, it will be said, That the *evidences* of our religion are not convincing, and that the *doctrines* of it are not credible.

One word, then, on *each* of these bold insinuations.

I. The EVIDENCES of *revealed religion* are so many and various; they lye so deep, or extend so wide; and consequently the difficulty of collecting them into one view is so great, that few men have, perhaps, comprehended the full force and effect of them. At least, none but persons of very superior industry, as well as understanding, have a right to pronounce on the total amount of such evidence.

But the *chief* evidences of the *Christian Religion* are drawn from PROPHECIES, and

MIRACLES; and who are they who tell us, that these methods of proof are unreasonable or unsatisfactory?

1. That the argument from PROPHECIES should not convince those, who have not considered the occasion, and design of them, the purposes they were intended to serve, and therefore the degree of light and clearness, with which it was proper they should be given; who have not studied the language in which those prophecies are conveyed, the state of the times in which they were delivered, the manners, the customs, the opinions of those to whom they were addressed; above all, who have not taken the pains to acquire a very exact and extensive knowledge of history, and so are not qualified to judge how far they have been accomplished; that to such persons as these, I say, the argument from prophecy should not appear to have all that evidence which believers ascribe to it, is very likely; but then this effect is to be accounted for, not from their knowledge, but their ignorance, not from their *seeing* too clearly, but from their not seeing at all, or but imperfectly, into the merits of this argument. As for those, who have searched deepest, and inquired with most care into this kind of evidence, they depose unanimously in its

favour, and profess themselves to have received conviction from it. So that, although there may be difficulties in explaining particular prophecies, and though the completion of some be questioned, or not fully apprehended, yet, on the whole, there is so much light arising out of this evidence, that it must be great presumption in any man to say that there is no strength at all in it. Indeed, if the appeal lie to authority (as it must do, if men will not, or cannot, inquire for themselves) we can scarce help concluding that the argument from prophecy carries with it a very considerable degree of evidence, since we find that such a man as Newton, not only submitted to this evidence himself, but thought it no misapplication of his great talents, to illustrate and enforce it. Yet, such is the judgment or temper of our leaders[d] in infide-

d "Une preuve de sa bonne foi, c'est qu'il [M. Newton] "a commenté l'Apocalypse. Il y trouve clairement que le "Pape est l'Antichrist, et il explique d'ailleurs ce livre "comme tous ceux qui s'en sont mêlés. Apparemment "qu'il a voulu par ce commentaire CONSOLER LA RACE "HUMAINE de la supériorité qu'il avoit sur elle." Œuvres de Voltaire, T. v. c. 29. 1757.

"If he [K. James I.] has composed a commentary on the "Revelations, and proved the Pope to be Antichrist; may "not a similar reproach be extended to the famous Na-"pier; and even to NEWTON, at a time when learning "was much more advanced than during the reign of

lity, that they had rather turn this very circumstance to the discredit of human nature itself (exhibited in its fairest form, and shining out with full lustre, in the virtues and accomplishments of that divine man) than allow it to do honour to that immortal object of their fear and spite, revealed religion.

2. The other great foundation of our faith is laid in MIRACLES; a sort of evidence, which may be estimated without that learning, or that sagacity, which is required in the case of *prophecies*; and which some men therefore, out of the abundance of their common sense, have taken the freedom to account of little weight or value. Yet, what opinion soever these persons may have of their own understandings, they will scarce be able to convince a reasonable man that this evidence is not conclusive, and even incontestible, if they will but place it in a fair and just light. For the question is not concerning the evidence of miracles in *general*, but of miracles so circumstanced and so

"James? From the grossness of its superstitions, we "may infer the ignorance of an age; but never should "pronounce concerning the FOLLY OF AN INDIVIDUAL, "from his admitting popular errors, consecrated with the "appearance of religion." Hume's Hist. of Great Britain, Vol. VI. p. 136. Lond. 1762. 8vo.

attested as those of the *Gospel*. Now, when the Religion to which this attestation is given, has nothing in it which appears unworthy of the Deity; when the purpose for which the supposed miracles are wrought is such as must be allowed the most important of any that, in our ideas, could enter into the divine counsels with regard to mankind; when these miracles have further the advantage of being attested by the most unexceptionable characters, and of being recorded in books, written soon after they were *wrought*, and by those who *saw* them wrought, and in books too, which have been transmitted, without any note of suspicion on them, to our times; when, lastly, these miracles have all the circumstances of public notoriety attending them, when no contemporary evidence discredits, and when many otherwise inexplicable facts and events, suppose and confirm them; when such miracles, I say, as these, and under such circumstances only, are alledged in support of the Christian Revelation, it must be a very extraordinary turn of mind that can reject, as nothing, the evidence resulting from them. With any other miracles, however numerous, however confidently asserted, or plausibly set forth, we have nothing to do. There may have been ten thousand impostures of this sort, in the world. But

*these* miracles speak their own credibility so strongly, that they are admitted, on human testimony, with the highest reason; and it must be more than a slender metaphysical argument, taken from their contrariety to what is called experience, which can prevent our belief of them, and overpower the natural sense of the human mind.

It seems then, even on this slight view of the subject, that, if these two capital arguments from *prophecies and miracles*, for the truth of Christianity, appear inconclusive to unbelievers, the cause must be some other than a want of that evidence, which may satisfy a reasonable man.

II. But, perhaps the DOCTRINES of Christianity are such as revolt the rational mind, and are not capable of being supported by any evidence.

Let us inquire then what truth there is in this *second* allegation of unbelievers.

It is not possible, in a discourse of this nature, to enter into a detail on the subject; but the chief obstacles to a faith in Jesus, independently of the evidence on which it rests, are, I suppose, these TWO.

1. A confused idea that the law of nature is sufficient to the salvation of mankind;

2. The mysterious nature of the Christian revelation.

Reason, they say, is a sufficient guide in matters of Religion; therefore, Christianity is unnecessary: Again, Christianity is all over mysterious; therefore, it is unreasonable.

Now, it will not be presuming too much to say, that the greater advances any man makes in true knowledge, the more insignificant must these *two* great stumbling-blocks of infidelity needs appear to him.

1. And, *first, for the sufficiency of nature in matters of religion.*

Whether *nature* be a sufficient guide in *morals*, let the history of mankind declare. They who know most of that history, and have, besides, a philosophic knowledge of human nature, are the proper judges of the question; and to that tribunal I leave it: the *rather*, because, though it be very clear what its decision must be, I hold, that what is most essential to the Christian religion (which is a

very different thing from *a republication of the law of nature)* is not at all concerned in it.

Let the law of nature be what it will, under this idea of a guide in morals, let Socrates, if you please, be as great a master of it, as Jesus, still the importance of Christianity remains, and is indeed very little affected by that concession.

Our religion teaches, that man is under the sentence of mortality, and that immortal life in happiness, (which is the true idea of Gospel-salvation) is the gift of God through Christ Jesus. These it relates as *two* facts, which it requires us to believe on its own authority; *facts*, which could not otherwise have come to our knowledge, and on which the whole superstructure of Christianity is raised.

Now, let the men of reason, the men who say, WE SEE, tell us, whether they are sure that these facts are false; and, if they are not, whether they know of any natural means by which *that sentence of mortality* can be reversed, or *that gift of immortality* can be secured.

Yes, they will say, by *a moral and virtuous life*, and by a *religious trust*, which nature dictates, *in the goodness of the Deity*. What? Is any man so assured of his own virtue, as that he dares expect so great things from it? Does he think it so perfect and of such efficacy, as that it should remove a curse which lies on his nature, that it should redeem him from a general sentence, which is gone forth against all mankind? Is it not enough, that he does his duty (though where is the man that does that?) and thereby consults his own true interest in this world, without requiring that his merits should deliver him from the doom of death; or that, of force, they should compel the divine *goodness* to deliver him from it?

But say, that the boundless mercy of God might so far consider the poor imperfect virtues of his lost creature, as to free him from the bondage of *death*, will he pretend that he has any claim, even upon infinite goodness itself, for *eternal life in glory*? All that reason suggests is, that, some way or other, either in this state or in one to come, he shall be no loser by his virtue: but so immense a reward is surely, not of *right*; and reason is too modest to entertain the least expectation, or even thought of it.

You see then what *the sufficiency of nature* comes to: It leaves us, for any thing we know, under the sentence of *death*; and, for any thing we can do, very much short of *eternal life*. And is this all we get by following *nature*, as our all-sufficient guide, and rejecting the assistance of *Revelation*? Are men satisfied to live, as they do here, and then to die for ever; and all this, rather than condescend to lay hold on the mercy of God through Jesus? If they are, their ambition is very moderate; but, surely, this is not a moderation of that sort which is prescribed by *reason*.

2. But they fly now (and it is their last resource) to the *mysterious nature of the dispensation itself*, which, they say, is perfectly irreconcileable with the principles of natural reason.

That Christianity is *mysterious*, that is, that it acquaints us with many things which our faculties could not have discovered, and which they cannot fully comprehend or satisfactorily explain, is an undoubted truth.—The pride of reason, when, from human sciences, where it saw much and thought it saw every thing, it turns to these divine studies, is something mortified to find a representation of things very

different from what it should previously have conceived, and impenetrable in many respects by its utmost diligence and curiosity. But then, when further exercised and improved, the same reason presently checks this presumption, as seeing very clearly, that there are inexplicable difficulties every where, in the world of *nature*, as well as in that of *grace*, and as seeing too, that, if both systems be the product of infinite wisdom, it could not be otherwise. Next, a thinking man, as his knowledge extends, and his mind opens, easily apprehends, that, in such a scheme as that of Christianity, which runs up into the arcana of the divine councils in regard to man, there will be many particulars of a new and extraordinary nature; and that such a dispensation must partake of the obscurity in which its divine Author chuses to veil his own glory.

Thus, we see, how the objections to the mysterious nature of the Gospel spring out of pride and inconsideration, and are gradually removed, as the mind advances in the further knowledge of God and itself.

Now, suppose there had been no mysterious parts in this Revelation, and that every thing had lain clear and open to the comprehension

of natural reason, what would the improved understanding of a wise man have thought of it? Would he not have said, that the whole was of mere human contrivance? since, if it were indeed of divine, it must needs have spoken its original by some marks of divinity, that is, by some signatures of incomprehensible wisdom, impressed upon it. Consider, I say, whether this judgment would not have been made of such a Revelation; and whether there be not more sense and reason in it, than in that *other* conclusion which many have drawn from the mysterious nature of the Christian religion.

It may appear, from these cursory observations, that *faith and knowledge* are no such enemies to each other, as they have been sometimes represented; and that neither the *evidences* of Christianity, nor the *doctrines* of it, need decline the scrutiny of the most improved reason. Conclude, therefore, when ye hear a certain language on this subject, that it is equally foolish, as it is indecent; and that ye may safely profess a *belief* in Jesus, without risking the reputation of your *wisdom*.

Another conclusion is, that, when unbelievers lay claim to a more than ordinary share

of sense and penetration, we may allow their claim, if we see fit, for other reasons, but NOT for their disdainful rejection of our divine religion. We must have better proofs of their sufficiency than this, before we subscribe to it. We may even be allowed to conclude, from this circumstance of their unbelief, that they either *see not* so clearly as they pretend, or that the case is still worse with them, if they do. They are ready to ask us, indeed, in the prompt language of the Pharisees to our Lord, *Are we blind also?* To which question, having such an answer at hand, we need look out for no other than that of Jesus, *If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see,* THEREFORE *your sin remaineth.*

# SERMON XIX.

PREACHED MAY 12, 1771.

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1 COR. viii. 1.

*Knowledge puffeth up; but Charity edifieth.*

THERE is none of our little accomplishments, or advantages, which we are not apt to make the foundation of pride and vanity. When, upon comparing ourselves with others, in any respect, we *entertain* a higher opinion of ourselves than we ought, this sentiment is called PRIDE. And when we are forward to *express* the good opinion, we have of ourselves, to others, in our words or actions, (even though such opinion be but proportioned to our desert)

we give to this disposition the name of VANITY. Each of these affections of the mind is, a real vice: *Pride*, because it violates truth and reason; and *Vanity*, because it violates Christian charity.

But, of all the subjects of comparison which betray us into these vices, none is thought to produce them so easily, and to inflame them to that degree, as *learning or knowledge*. And we see the reason why it should be so. For knowledge arises from the exertion of our best and noblest faculties; those faculties which distinguish us to most advantage, not only from the inferior creatures, but from each other. Hence we are naturally led to place a higher value on this, than other acquisitions; and to make our pride and boast of that which is, indeed, the glory of our nature.

The observation then seems well founded; and the Apostle advances no more than what experience teaches, when he affirms in the text—THAT KNOWLEDGE PUFFETH UP. Where, however, we are to take notice, that the remedy for this vice is not ignorance (which, though for different reasons, is as apt to engender pride and self-conceit, as knowledge itself) but Christian love and charity. For,

when the Apostle had brought this charge against *knowledge, that it puffeth up*, he does not say that *ignorance* keeps men humble, but that *charity edifieth*. Whence it appears, that, to correct this excess of self-love, which we call pride, the Apostle would not have us renounce the way of learning and knowledge, but only increase our love and respect for mankind.

Charity, then, is the proper cure of LEARNED PRIDE; and of those unfriendly vices, which spring from it, *sufficiency, self-importance*, and *ostentation*: And it will be worth our while to consider, *in what* RESPECTS, and *by what* MEANS, this divine principle of charity contributes to that end. And this it does

1. By keeping men steady to that OBJECT, which they ought to propose to themselves in the cultivation of knowledge, I mean the *edification of each other — charity edifieth*.

One of the ancient sects of philosophy carried their admiration of *knowledge* so far, that they made it *the supreme good* of man, and built their whole *moral* system (if it might be called such) on this extravagant idea. Whereas, common sense, as well as religion, teaches,

that knowledge, like our other faculties and attainments, is only an instrument of doing good to others; not to be regarded by us, as the end of moral action, or a good simply in itself, but as one of those means by which we may express our moral character; and promote the common interest of society, which (in subordination to the will and glory of God) is the proper end of man. Now, if we keep this end in view, which Christian charity sets before us, we shall neither cultivate knowledge for its own sake (which is a strain of fanaticism, unsuited to our present condition); nor for the sake of that complacency, which may be apt to result from it; nor solely, for any other selfish purpose to which it may serve: but we shall chiefly and ultimately refer it to the use and edification of our brother; and shall therefore suppress that inordinate elation of heart and display of vainglory, which tend so much to obstruct the success of our applications to him in this way.

2. Charity, estimating the value of knowledge by the good it *actually* does to others, finds the very foundation of pride and vanity, in the application of it, in a great measure taken away. For, how divine a thing soever knowledge may appear to the mind, when

heated by speculation, we shall find, in practice, that it falls very much short of those glorious ideas we had formed of it; that the *real service*, we are enabled to do to mankind by our most improved faculties, affords but little occasion to the gratulations of self-esteem (which, when resulting from such service, are, no doubt, more pardonable than in any other case whatsoever); and that, if such gratulations arise in us from some slight and partial services done to others, they are sufficiently checked and mortified by the general ill success of our most strenuous endeavours, and best concerted designs. The philosopher and divine, after many studious days and sleepless nights, are ready to promise to themselves great effects from their systems and apologies. Alas, the world is little bettered or improved by them. Its amusements, its follies, its vices, take their usual course. Reason and knowledge are found but feeble instruments of its conversion. It attends so little, or so negligently to its instructors, that it remains almost as uninformed, and as corrupt as before.

Such is too commonly the issue of our best pains in the cultivation of moral and religious truth! Or, if in some rare cases it be otherwise, and some sensible, some considerable,

benefit result from them, still it will be far less than the good man wishes and intends. For, burning with this holy zeal of love to mankind, the charitable instructor of the ignorant is in the condition of HIM, whose ambitious zeal the poet so well describes: His successes do but inflame his desires; and *he reckons he has done nothing, so long as there remains any thing for him to do* [a].

So certainly does charity, in this work of learned instruction, disconcert and subdue all the projects and emotions of pride!

3. Charity takes a sure way to counteract those movements of vanity and self-applause, which the pursuits of knowledge are apt to excite, *by confining our attention to solid and important subjects.* For, when the mind is thus employed, it naturally refers its acquisitions to *use*, not vanity; or, if vanity should still find room to spring up with this crop of useful knowledge, its growth would be much checked by this benevolent and social attention: It would either die away amidst these higher regards of duty and public spirit, or would lose

[a] Nil actum credens, dum quid superesset agendum.
Lucan.

at least very much of its malignant nature, and of those qualities which render it so offensive to mankind. Whereas, when we employ ourselves on frivolous or unimportant subjects, which offer nothing to our view besides the ingenuity of the speculation, and the distinction of the pursuit, these ideas are so present to the mind, and engross it so much, that vanity and self-esteem almost necessarily spring from them, luxuriant and unrestrained.

Besides, the mind, which loves to justify itself in all its operations, finding but little real use or worth in these disquisitions, strives to make itself amends by placing an imaginary value upon them; and grows so much the more enamoured of them, as it foresees and expects the neglect and indifference of other men.

Hence, the sufficiency of such persons as wholly employ their time and pains in the more abstract studies, in the minuter parts of learning, and universally in such inquiries as terminate only or chiefly in curiosity and amusement, is more than ordinarily glaring and offensive. Their minds are *puffed up* with immoderate conceptions of their own importance; and this unnatural tumour they are

neither able, nor willing, to conceal from others. The secret is, they would persuade themselves first, and then the world, that their studies and occupations are less frivolous, than they in earnest believe or suspect them, at least, to be.

Now, Charity, indisposing us to these fruitless speculations, and delighting to cultivate such parts of knowledge as have a real dignity in them, and are productive of light and use, tends directly to keep us modest, by taking away this so natural temptation to pride and self-conceit.

4. Further, we may observe that, of the more important studies themselves, such as we call *practical*, are less liable to this perversion of vanity, than the speculative, to what important ends soever they may ultimately be referred. And the reason of the difference is, that, in the former case, the calls of charity upon us are more instant. We cannot stir a step in practical meditations without considering what use and benefit may result from them: while the speculative seem to terminate in themselves; are pursued, for the time at least, for their own sakes; and so, by keeping the

ultimate end out of sight, do not divert the mind enough from that complacent attention to its own ingenious researches, whence the passion of pride is apt to take its rise.

Not but there are some parts of knowledge, which, though called practical, and referring indeed to practice, have a different effect. But these are such, as are in their own nature boastful and ostentatious; calculated not so much for use, as pleasure; or, at most, terminating in some private and selfish end. The proficients in these popular arts and studies are tempted to regard, not the good *simply*, which their knowledge might do to others, but the general influence of it, and the consideration, which, by means of such influence, whether to a good or bad purpose, they may draw to themselves.

Of this sort was, too commonly, the study of eloquence in the ancient, and sometimes, I doubt, in the modern world. Vanity is apt to mix itself with these practical studies, and to result from them; the question generally being, not how the greatest good may be effected by them, but how the greatest impression may be made.

Divine and moral subjects, *practically* considered (though vanity may creep in here), are more secure from this abuse. For, respecting the spiritual and moral good of men, distinctly and exclusively, a regard to the end must correct and purify the means. And thus we are not surprised to find, that, while a vain rhetorician[b] is said to have boasted, in the hearing of all Greece, that *he knew every thing*, the sober moralist of Athens[c] readily confessed, *he knew nothing*.

5. Another way, in which *charity* operates to the suppression of *pride*, is, *by increasing our good opinion of other men*. *Pride* is an elation of mind upon comparing ourselves with others, and observing how much we excell them in any respect; and, in the present instance, how much we excell them in point of *knowledge*. When the mind is wholly occupied by *self-love*, it easily magnifies its own attainments, and as easily diminishes those of others: whence the advantage, on a comparison, must needs be to *itself*. But when *charity*, or the love of others, prevails in us to any degree, we are willing to do them

[b] HIPPIAS, THE ELEAN. Cic. de Oratore, c. 32.
[c] SOCRATES.

*justice* at least, and *but* justice to ourselves: nay, our affection to others makes us willing to see their good qualities in the fairest light, to magnify to ourselves their excellencies, and to lessen or overlook their defects; while on the other hand, it inclines us readily to forego any undue claims of pre-eminence, and even to abate something of what we might strictly claim to ourselves: whence the comparison must be more favourable to *others;* and our pride, if not entirely prevented, must be considerably reduced. Increase this charity, and the pride still lessens; till, at length, it is almost literally true, as the Apostle divinely expresses it, that, *in lowliness of mind, each esteems other better than himself; better,* in respect to *knowledge,* as to every thing else.

6. Lastly, charity, not only by its qualities, but in the *very nature of things,* is destructive of all *pride.* For what is pride, but an immoderate *love* of ourselves? And what is charity, but a fervent *love* of other men? It is the same passion of love, only directed to different objects. When it is concentred in a man's self, it naturally grows abundant and excessive: divert some part of it upon others, and the selfish love is proportionably restrained. Just as seas and rivers would overflow their shores and

banks, if they had no outlet or circulation: but issuing forth in useful streams or vapours to refresh the land, they are kept in due proportion, and neither deluge the rest of the globe, nor drain themselves. Thus the affection of *love*, if too much confined, would overflow in *pride and arrogance*; but, when part of it is diffused on others, the rest is innoxious and even salutary, as supplying the mind only with a *just and moderate self-esteem.*

Hence we see that charity, by its very operation, corrects the excesses of self-love; and therefore of learned pride (which is *one* of those excesses) as well as any other vice, which the confined and inordinate exercise of that passion is apt to produce.

In these several ways then, whether, by prescribing the proper *end* of knowledge, *the edification of our neighbour*, an attention to which must needs lessen the temptation to pride; or, by suggesting how *imperfectly* that end is attained by knowledge, which must mortify, rather than inflame our pride; or, by confining the candidates of knowledge *to solid and important subjects*, and, of *these*, rather to *practical* subjects, than those of speculation, both which pursuits are unfavourable to the

growth of pride; or, by increasing *our good opinion of others*, engaged in the same pursuits of knowledge, which must so far take from our fancied superiority over them; or, lastly, *by the necessary effect of its operation*, which is essentially destructive of that vicious self-love, which is the parent of such fancies —In *all* these respects, I say, it is clearly seen how CHARITY, whose office it is to *edify* others, is properly applied to the cure of that tumour of the mind, which knowledge generates, and which we know by the name of LEARNED PRIDE.

There are many other considerations, no doubt, which serve to mortify this pride; but nothing tends so immediately to remove it, as the increase of charity. It is therefore to be wished, that men, engaged in the pursuits of learning, would especially cultivate in themselves this divine principle. Knowledge, when tempered by humility, and directed to the ends of charity, is indeed a valuable acquisition; and, though no fit subject of vain-glory, is justly entitled to the esteem of mankind. It should further be remembered, that this virtue, which so much adorns knowledge, is the peculiar characteristic grace of our religion; without which, all our attainments, of whatever

kind, are fruitless and vain. Let the man of Science, then, who has succeeded to his wish in rearing some mighty fabric of human knowledge, and from the top of it is tempted with a vain complacency to *look down*, as the phrase is, *on the ignorant vulgar*; let such an one not forget to say with HIM, who had been higher yet, even as high as *the third Heaven*[d], "*Though I understand all mysteries, and all* "*knowledge, and have not charity, I am no-* "*thing*[e]."

[d] 2 Cor. xii. 2. [e] 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

the time that a man persuades himself he ought to commit them? This would open a door to all the evils of the most outrageous fanaticism, and evacuate the whole moral law, under the pretence of conscience."

In general, it would do so: and we shall presently find, that St. Paul does not pretend to justify *himself*, notwithstanding *he verily believed he ought to do these things.* But to see the degree of his crime, it will be convenient, and but just to the criminal, to call to mind, in the first place, the peculiar circumstances under which it was committed.

Paul was at that time a Jew; and, as a follower of this law, his conduct, supposing his conscience to have been rightly informed, had not been blameable; on the contrary, had been highly meritorious. For the law of Moses made the restraint of opinions, in matter of religion, lawful: Heterodoxy was to a Jew but another word for disloyalty; and a zeal to see the rigour of the law executed on that crime, was the honour of a Jewish subject. Paul, then, conceiving of Jesus as a false prophet, and the author of a new worship, contrary to that of the God of Israel, Paul, I say, regarding Jesus in this light, but conformed to the spirit

of the law, when he joined in persecuting the Jewish Christians, and must esteem himself to have deserved well of it.

And this he, in fact, did. For, reckoning up the several merits, which, as a Jew, he might claim to himself, he mentions this zeal of persecution, as one, which did him honour, under that character -- *Concerning zeal,* says he, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH[a].

The crime of Paul, then, as of the other Jews, in persecuting Christ and his religion, was not *simply* the crime of persecution (for, had that religion been a false one, by the peculiar structure of the Jewish œconomy, there would have been no crime at all in punishing such of the Jews, as professed themselves of it); but his guilt was, and, in general, the guilt of the other Jews was, in misapplying the law to this particular case; in persecuting a just and divine person, whom their own prophets had foretold and pointed out, who came in no opposition to the Jewish law, nay, who came *not to destroy,* but *to fulfill*[b].

The conclusion is, that, though *persecution* be on no pretence of conscience excusable in

[a] Philip. iii. 6. [b] Matt. v. 17.

another man, yet in a Jew, and as directed against an apostate Jew, it had not this malignity, and was not the proper subject of his abhorrence[c].

To the question then, "Whether Paul's belief justified his practice, in the case before us, that is, whether he did right *in doing that which he verily believed he ought to do*," You may take his own answer — *This*, says he, *is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF[d]. He owns himself, we see, to have been *the chief of sinners*, that is, making all allowance for the hyperbole and modesty of the expression, a very great sinner. And if you ask in what respect, he tells you that, too: for, in the immediately preceding verses, he declares the ground of this charge upon himself, *That he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.* And in another place he says of himself, *I am the least of the Apostles; that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God*[e].

[c] BAYLE, Comm. Phil. Part II. Ch. IV. LOCKE on Toleration, Letter I. WARBURTON, D. L. B. v. S. 11.

[d] 1 Tim. i. 15. [e] 1 Cor. xv. 9.

You see, then, that, notwithstanding his former religion authorized him to persecute its enemies, notwithstanding he verily believed, that he ought to persecute Jesus as such, yet he now condemns himself, as having grievously sinned in giving way to that authority, and to that persuasion. How is this conduct to be accounted for and made consistent? plainly, by observing, that he had persecuted without warrant, even from his former religion; that he had culpably and rashly overlooked (what he might and ought to have seen) that Jesus was no fit object of this severity even to a Jew, that he was no enemy or subverter of the Jewish law, that he was no rebel to the God and king of Israel, but came indeed from him, acted by his commission, and displayed all the signs and credentials of the Messiah, in whom the law and the prophets were finally to be completed.

Without doubt, his being now of a religion, which forbad persecution, under all its forms, sharpened his sense of this crime, and may perhaps account for his calling himself the *chief* of sinners; yet, that the persecution of Christians was to him a crime, and that he had sinned in committing it, he could not but know, and is clearly to be inferred from his expression.

All the use he makes of his Jewish persuasion, is, but to palliate something what he knew was without excuse: — *I obtained mercy*, says he, *because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*: that is, because I persecuted in my *unbelieving* state of a Jew, and was kept, by the genius of the Mosaic law, from *knowing* and considering the general malignity of persecution. And that there may be some ground of mercy in this consideration, who can doubt, when we find the Son of God interceding for his very murderers on the same principle — *Father*, says he, *forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

There was this difference, you see, between a Jewish and a Gentile persecutor. The *Jew* was answerable for his not seeing that Jesus was the Messiah: The *Gentile* was to answer for that ignorance, and for his not seeing the general iniquity of persecution, on account of religion.

Paul, however, was certainly to blame; nay, he takes much blame on himself, for acting *ignorantly* against the name of Jesus, though his ignorance was of the former kind only.

2. But now another question, and a very important one, arises out of this state of the

case. Paul *verily thought* that the religion of Jesus was an imposture. Yet he was *mistaken* in thinking so; and, what is more, his mistake was highly *criminal.*

What then shall we say to those persons, who affirm, that, provided a man be *persuaded* of the truth of his opinions, he is not answerable for his mistakes? or, in other words, what becomes of that notion which many have taken up, concerning *the innocency of error in matters of religion?*

I understand what is generally alledged in support of this candid and conciliating opinion. But the text says expressly, that Paul *verily believed he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus;* and with all this firmness of belief Paul was *the chief of sinners.*

Men therefore conclude too hastily, when from the sole *persuasion* of their sincerity they infer the innocence of their errors.

"But what then would you require of poor unhappy man, whose *reason* is naturally so weak, and whose *prejudices* are often so strong?" Why, to use the force he has; to consider well whether he be indeed sincere (for to be firmly,

and to be *sincerely* persuaded, is not always the same thing); to employ his reason, such as it is, with care, and to controul his prejudices, what he can, by an impartial examination.

All this, it will be answered, is already done. It may be so. Let me then have leave to interrogate the sincere rejecter of Christianity, and try his good faith, of which he is so well assured, by the following questions.

"Has he cultivated his mind, and furnished himself with the requisite helps for religious inquiry? Has he studied the sacred volumes with care? Has he considered their scope and end? their genius and character? Has he fixed the boundaries of reason and of faith? Does he know where the province of the former ends, and where that of the second commences? Has he studied himself, his faculties and powers, his wants and necessities? Has he weighed the importance of the search, he is making into the will and word of God? Has he made that search with a suitable diligence and sobriety? Has he acoustomed himself to the investigation of moral evidence? Has he collected, compared, and estimated, what is brought in evidence for the truth of the Christian religion? Has he, in short, (for I address

myself to capable inquirers only) omitted none of those means which reason requires, and employed all that industry, and thought, and application, which the sincere love of truth demands on so momentous an occasion?

"Still, I have other inquiries to make. Has he approached the sanctuary of religion with awe? Has he purged his mind from all gross, nay from all refined vices? Had he no interest to serve, no prejudice to sooth, no predominant passion to gratify, by a hasty conclusion concerning the truth of Christianity? Or, (not to suspect a philosophic mind of these vulgar illusions) had he no vanity to flatter, no capricious levity to indulge, by a short and disdainful rejection of it? Had he no spleen to divert, no regard of fashion, no partialities of acquaintance or education to mislead him, from conviction? Had he no secret wish or hope, which he scarcely durst tell to himself, that his inquiry would end in doubt at least, if not in infidelity? In a word, can he assure himself, that in these several respects, he had no bias on his mind, or did his best at least to have none, against a conclusion, to which an impartial love of truth might invite and compell him?"

Had St. Paul himself been questioned in this manner, concerning his sincere belief, that he *ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus*, he would hardly, I suppose, have said, that he had fulfilled all these conditions; —But we know what he did say, to himself and to the world: He said, He was THE CHIEF OF SINNERS.

So remote is persuasion from sincerity! and so little acquainted, many times, are *innocence and error!*

But 'these questions, it will be said, may be retorted on the believer; who may be neither more diligent, nor more impartial in his inquiries, than the unbeliever.'

Allow that they may; yet observe the immense difference of the two cases, in regard both to the *danger* incurred, and to the *crime* committed.

If I *believe*, on insufficient grounds, what do I lose? only what I can well spare; my unbelief and my vices. And what do I gain? that, which of all things is most precious to me; peace of mind, and the hopes of heaven. On the other hand, if I *disbelieve*, I lose all that is valuable in both worlds, and gain nothing

but the sad privilege of being set free from the restraints of this religion [d].

Consider, too, the difference of the *crime*, in the two cases. If the Christian errs in admitting the truth of his religion, he has only to answer for his ill judgment, at most: he could be drawn to this persuasion by no criminal motives: for, which of these could bias him to the belief of the holiest of all religions? If the error lies on the other side, in rejecting this religion, how shall he know, that, besides the blame of judging ill, some immoral purposes and dispositions may not have secretly concurred to pervert his judgment? The Christian may be unreasonable: but the unbeliever, I do not say, certainly, but, is too probably *vicious*.

Thus the danger, in all views, is on the unbelieving side. And if there be difficulty in knowing when I am sincere, there is none in knowing which of the two mistakes is safer and less criminal.

It will be said, perhaps, that an inquirer may be biassed in favour of Christianity by cor-

[d] De se tromper en croyant vraie la religion Chretienne, il n'y a pas grand' chose à perdre: mais quel malheur de se tromper en la croyant fausse! M. Pascal, p. 225.

rupt motives, that is, by views of *credit* or *interest*, attending the profession of it, in countries where this religion is legally established. Without doubt. But such persons can hardly put themselves in the case of St. Paul, and say, They are *verily persuaded*, they ought to be Christians. For such gross motives can be no secret to their own hearts, and they cannot but know that Christianity condemns all such motives. I regard then such persons in the light of *hypocrites* confessed, and by no means in that of *believers*. On the other hand, men may *affect* to disbelieve from the like views of *credit* or *interest*, in certain circumstances; and so become hypocrites of another kind; of which the number is, perhaps, not inconsiderable. But I am here speaking of such corrupt partialities as may consist with a firm belief, or disbelief of Christianity. And here it is plain, the criminality is likely to be much greater in him who without ground rejects, than in him who too hastily admits such a religion.

To conclude, then, with the case of St. Paul, which has given occasion to these reflexions.

No firmness of persuasion, it is plain, can justify a man in being led by it into the commission of gross and acknowledged crimes. And the reason is, that no persuasion of the

truth of any principle can be greater than that which every man has that he ought not to commit such actions. If St. Paul's persuasion saved him from this guilt, it was owing to the peculiar genius of the Jewish religion.

But, further, St. Paul was blameable for taking up that *persuasion*, on which he acted. His mind had been corrupted by hasty prejudices, and ungoverned passion. He concluded too fast, then, when he thought his persuasion *sincere*, though it was indeed strong and violent. His persuasion did not exclude error, and that error implied insincerity, and so was not *innocent*.

It follows from the whole, that we ought never to *act* wrong on the pretence of conscience; and that we should learn to suspect the possibility of guilt's mixing itself even with what we call our speculative opinions. Error may be innocent; but not so long as truth lies before us, and we may, if we do our duty, discover it. Let our inquiries, then, in all matters of moment, above all in those of religion, be diligent, and strictly honest. Where these precautions are not observed, our mistakes are always blameable, because in some degree they are wilful and insincere.

# SERMON XXI.

PREACHED MAY 10, 1767.

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St. LUKE, vi. 26.

*Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you.*

AMONG other *woes* denounced in this chapter by our Saviour against different sorts of men, we have one in the text against *those, of whom all men speak well.*

The reason of this severe sentence may not appear at first sight: first, because it may not immediately occur to us, what hurt or inconvenience there can be in every man's good word; and, secondly, because every man's good word is not likely to be had.

As to this last particular, it is true, the praise of *all men*, in the full extent of the words, is not to be obtained. But the sense of the text requires, only, that we understand a very general praise; and this we see many men obtain: And if we only want to know, in what respects, the possession of this praise can be deemed a misfortune, we shall find them, I suppose, (without looking further) in the following considerations.

The WOE, of being *well spoken of by all men*, may be apprehended, if we reflect, That (taking the world as it is) its good word, so largely bestowed on any man, implies *a mediocrity of virtue, at the best*;—that it frequently implies, *a considerable degree of positive ill-desert*;—that it sometimes implies, *a thorough depravity and prostitution of the moral character*.

From these THREE considerations, I propose to illustrate the *woe* of the text.—In moral discourses, it is scarce possible to avoid very general assertions. These may sometimes want to be restrained: but ye will do it for yourselves, as ye see cause; for the appeal lies, all along, to your own bosoms and experience.

I. I say then, *first*; that to be *well spoken of by all men*, implies A MEDIOCRITY OF VIRTUE, AT THE BEST.

And the assertion is founded on many reasons. An eminent degree of virtue excites envy; is not generally understood; is unapt to accommodate itself to men's views and expectations; and, lastly, is liable to some excesses, and connected with some infirmities, which are either peculiar to itself, or would less disgrace a virtue of the common stamp.

Let us weigh these several reasons.

1. The chapter of *envy* is a common one, and has been exhausted by every moralist. When a man's worth lifts him above the generality of his species, he is thought to depress those who feel themselves beneath him. Their pride is hurt, their self-love is mortified, by the acknowledged preference. And in this state of things, no wonder that much industry is employed to obscure a virtue, whose unclouded splendour would give pain.

2. But men sometimes detract from a superior character, with perfect good faith. It is not envy, but *inapprehension*, which sets

them on work. For it is with some virtues, as with those sublimer graces in a work of art or genius: few, but such as could have set the example, have any idea or conception of them.

Thus, a disinterested goodness, when carried to a certain length; a generosity of mind, when stretched beyond certain bounds; a sense of honour, operating to a certain degree; in a word, temperance, justice, piety, humanity, any or all of these virtues, exalted to a certain pitch, are either not comprehended, or are perhaps traduced, as marks of folly and extravagance, by those who are not capable of ascending to these heights themselves. Of which, the instances are so frequent in all history, and even in common life, that no man wants to be reminded of them.

3. Still, if superior virtue were only envied, or ill-understood, the misfortune would not be so great. It is, besides, *active, enterprising, constant, and inflexible.* It contents not itself with being merely passive, innoxious, blameless: it would oblige, befriend, and merit of mankind. It would be distinguished by actual services, or at least by glorious attempts. And in prosecuting these, it consults no man's occasions; bends to no man's prejudices;

leans to no partial interests or considerations; is simple, uniform, invariable, and holds on its course, steadily and directly, towards its main end and scope. There is a magnanimity in true worth and goodness, which scorns and rejects all disguises, and would appear and be itself.

A character of this stamp is too awful to be popular. There is something of terror in so sublime a virtue; and those who are distinguished by it, may be esteemed, perhaps, and revered, but are rarely applauded by the world. What difference between the divine integrity of Cato, and the specious temporizing virtues of Cæsar! Yet, if history had been silent, we should easily have known which of these men was destined to be the idol of the Roman people.

4. Nor is even this the worst. Virtue, in this exalted state, is not easily restrained from running, at times, into certain EXCESSES: *excesses*, which spring, as it were, from its very essence, and which the truly wise allow for, excuse, and almost admire; but which hurt the reputation more, with base and ordinary minds, than the virtue itself, under a due exertion, serves and promotes it.

When the virtuous Brutus, in the crisis of the Roman state, struggling for its last breath of liberty, chose rather to put every thing to hazard, than *violate the strict forms of law and justice*[a]: — And again, when our virtuous Falkland was kept, by his nice sense of honour, from *taking some liberties*[b], which the duty of his place, the public service, and the practice of all times, might seem to authorize; when these great men, I say, erred from an excess of virtue, a thousand tongues were ready to blaspheme, and even ridicule their mistakes, while one or two only revered the honesty of mind, which gave birth to them.

These glorious excesses, which are frequent in a virtuous character, hardly deserve the name of infirmities: yet *infirmities*, in the common sense of the word, are the lot of human nature, in whatever state of perfection. That heat of mind, which nourishes heroic virtue, is apt to produce these; and, as the noblest genius sometimes lets fall inaccuracies, which moderate talents would correct; so the best man sometimes commits extravagancies, which a moderate virtue would avoid: and when this

a Plutarch. BRUTUS.

b Of opening private letters, and employing spies of state. CLARENDON.

mischance happens, the infirmity is sure to be observed, and never pardoned. Or, let the weakness be such, as is incident to our common nature; still its effects are very different; it shall eclipse half the virtues of an excellent man, and, in a common character, be either not seen, or not regarded.

So true it is, that, to be *well spoken of by all men*, implies but an ordinary share of virtue, at best! For, consider these several circumstances, and see what a shade they cast on the reputation of extraordinary men. To shine out in the full lustre of a general fame, is reserved for those, *whose virtue is not of a size to give umbrage; whose merits are to the level of all eyes; who adapt themselves with dexterity to all occasions; and who are kept, by their very mediocrity, from any infirmity, or excess.*

And it would be well, if the *woe* ended here; if the misfortune of these applauded men were negative only, and amounted to no more than the absence of vice, or the possession of virtue in the common degrees. But, I doubt, it amounts to much more: it frequently implies

II. A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF POSITIVE ILL-DESERT.

When the Jews, in a fit of ignorant zeal, were taking up stones to cast at our blessed Lord, he said to them: *Many* GOOD WORKS *have I shewed you from my Father; for which of* THESE *works do ye stone me*[c]? Intimating, that the resentment of a misjudging multitude is generally occasioned by praise-worthy actions. On the same principle, when shouts of popular applause are sounding in a man's ears, he may reasonably ask, *For which of my* EVIL DEEDS *is this praise wasted upon me*? For it is just as much to be expected that a clamorous praise should attend a bad action, as that a clamorous rage should be excited by a good one.

And if we look abroad into the world, we shall find, that it is not virtue, in whatever degree, but some popular vice, that too oft engages its warmest approbation. In fact, even a moderate share of virtue, joined to an inoffensive character, shall more frequently secure a man from the censure, than procure him the applause of mankind. To be generally *well spoken of*, he must do more than not offend: he must merit his reward, before it is conferred upon him. And, though illustrious services may sometimes extort this reward, yet the

[c] John x. 32.

surer and easier way to obtain it, is to please. And when I am to please *all men*, in order to obtain the suffrage of all, tell me what way there is of executing this project, without dishonouring myself. Men are not pleased, unless I humour their foibles, sooth their vices, serve their ill ends, or unjustifiable passions; and *woe* unto me, if I acquire their good opinion by these means.

But suppose I am restrained by some sense of decency and of duty, and not disposed to run all lengths in my endeavours to please. Still it is not nothing, to be silent where virtue bids me speak; it is something, to give a man leave to think he is honoured by me for that which deserves blame; it is base, to flatter and extoll immoderately even his good qualities; and it is flagitious to countenance and inflame his bad ones.

Yet one or other of these ways must he take, who is ambitious of every man's good word. And is there no *woe*, think ye, in such a conduct as this? Suppose I but sacrifice one virtue to my reputation, but one generous quality to my passion for fame; still am I innocent in making this sacrifice? Can I applaud myself

for making thus free with my moral character? Or, rather, have I not cause to humble myself under a sense of my ill-desert?

Yes, *woe* to that man, who, to be well with the world, or with any part of it, deserts any one virtuous principle, transgresses any one known duty, corrupts his conscience with any one deliberate vice. Let the world's applause be what it will; he is a loser who gains it on such terms.

But I am still putting matters at the best; For,

III. Lastly, this general acceptation, this mighty privilege of being *well spoken of by all men*, sometimes, and not unfrequently, demands a sacrifice, not of one, but all the virtues: it implies A THOROUGH DEPRAVITY AND PROSTITUTION OF THE MORAL CHARACTER.

Our delicacy will not bear to have this matter pushed home, and brought directly to ourselves. Our self-love revolts against the imputation; and no man applies so severe a censure to his own case, or that of his acquaintance.

Let us look abroad, then, for what we are willing to shift off so far from us. Let us look for this opprobrious character in ancient times, and distant regions, with which we may take greater liberties, and concerning which we may discourse without offence. And when we have found it, let us only remember that the character is no ideal one; that it is fairly taken from the annals of human nature, and may therefore, in part at least, concern ourselves.

A noble Roman is described by ONE who knew him well, in the following manner[d]: "He possessed, in a wonderful degree, the "faculty of engaging all men to himself, by "every art of address, and the most obsequious "application to their humours, purposes, and "designs. His fortune, his interest, nay his

[d] "Illa in illo homine mirabilia fuerunt, comprehendere "multos amicitiâ, tueri obsequio, cum omnibus com-"municare quod habebat, servire temporibus suorum "omnium, pecuniâ, gratiâ, labore corporis, scelere etiam, "si opus esset, et audaciâ: versare suam naturam, et "regere ad tempus, atque huc et illuc torquere et flectere: "cum tristibus severè, cum remissis jucunde; cum seni-"bus graviter, cum juventute comiter; cum facinorosis "audacter, cum libidinosis luxuriosè vivere. Hâc ille "tam variâ multiplicique naturâ, &c." *Cicero pro M. Cælio*, c. iii.

"person, was wholly their's; and he was ready "to shew his attachment to them by every "service, and, if occasion required it, by "every crime. He had the most perfect dex-"terity in moulding his own nature, and "shaping it into all forms. The men of "austere morals he could gain to himself, by "a well-dissembled severity; the more free "and libertine sort, by an unrestrained gaiety. "He could equally adapt himself to the vi-"vacity of youth, and to the gravity of old "age: with men of bold spirits and factious "designs, he was prompt, enterprizing, auda-"cious; with the men of pleasure, he could "be licentious, luxurious, dissolute."

What think ye, now, of this character? With so various and pliable a disposition, could he fail of being popular? And with so total a want of principle, can we doubt of his being abandoned? He was, in truth, both the one, and the other. He was the favourite[e], and the pest of his country: in a word, this man was, CATILINE.

But let us turn our thoughts from such a prodigy, and conclude only from the instance

[e] Juventus pleraque, sed maximè *nobilium*, Catilinæ incœptis favebat. *Sallust.* c. 17. And again: omnes *cuncta plebes*, Catilinæ incœpta probabat. c. 37.

here given, that a character may be much applauded and very worthless; and that, to be *well spoken of by all*, in a certain extent of those words, one must be, if not a Catiline, yet an unquestionably vicious and corrupt man.

I have now gone through the several topics, I proposed to illustrate in this discourse.

My more *immediate* design was, to explain and justify the text; to shew that it spake not without reason when it spake, perhaps, somewhat differently from our expectations; and that our divine master had abundant cause to pronounce a *woe* on those, of whom the world is so ready to speak well.

But in doing this, I persuade myself, I have done more; and, in shewing the reasons of this *woe*, have said enough to repress and mortify that lust of general praise, which is so fatal to our virtue, as well as happiness. For what can be more likely to restrain men from this folly, than to let them see, that the prize, they so ambitiously contend for, would be a misfortune to them, if it could be obtained; since a very general praise is rarely conferred, at best, but upon a feeble imperfect state of virtue; is, frequently, the reward of positive

ill-desert; and is, sometimes, the pay, that men receive for the greatest *crimes*.

These considerations shew the only true praise to be that which a well informed mind gives to itself. This praise is pure and unmixed; is only bestowed on real merit; and is nicely proportioned to the several degrees of it. It is the earnest too of every other praise, which ought to be precious to us. For, when conscience approves, good men and angels are ready to applaud: nay, when *a man's heart condemns him not, then has he confidence towards God*[f].

To conclude: it is in this contention of human life, as in those games of which the ancient world was so fond: the success consists not in the acclamations of the attending multitude, but in the crown which the victor receives at the hands of the appointed judge. If he obtains that great prize, it is of little moment whether the rest follow or not. The applause of the by-standers may add to the noise and pageantry of the day; but the triumph is sincere and complete without it.

As then it would be arrogance and inhumanity to reject universally the good opinion

[f] 1 John iii. 21.

of the world, so it would be folly, or something worse, to dote upon it. If it may be honestly obtained, it is well: if not, let the friend of virtue; above all, let the follower of Jesus, console himself, under the loss of it, with this reflection, "That it is no certain "argument of true honour and true happiness, "nay, that it is a presumption to the contrary, "to be found in the class of those, *of whom* "*all men speak well.*"

# SERMON XXII.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 6, 1774.

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St. JOHN viii. 9.

*Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn thee; Go, and sin no more.*

EVERY one understands the occasion of these words: *The absolution of the woman taken in adultery*, says an ancient writer, *has been always famous in the church*[a]: Indeed *so* famous, that some, who know but little of the other parts of the Gospel history, pretend to be well acquainted with this; from which they draw conclusions so favourable to their

[a] St. Ambrose. Apud Whitby.

own loose practices, that others of stricter morals have been disposed to question its authenticity, and to expunge this obnoxious passage from the sacred books.

The attempt, indeed, has not succeeded. The obnoxious passage is unquestionably authentick. But what then shall we say to the narrative itself? How are we to expound it consistently with the known character of Jesus? and how are we to obviate the ill consequences which seem so naturally to flow from it?

These questions will be answered by considering attentively the nature and circumstances of the case: from which it will appear, that this decision of our Lord is founded on the highest wisdom; and, when seen in its true light, affords no countenance to the licentious glosses of one party, and needs give no alarm to the scrupulous fears and apprehensions of another.

The fact is related by the sacred historian in these words: "The Scribes and Pharisees "brought to him a woman taken in adultery; "and when they had set her in the midst, they "say to him, Master, this woman was taken "in adultery in the very act. Now, Moses in

"the law commanded, that such should be "stoned; but what sayest thou?"

Thus far we see there was no difficulty. A crime had been committed, and might be proved; and their law had appointed the punishment. Why then do the Scribes and Pharisees apply to Jesus, for his judgment in the case? The text tells us; for it follows immediately—"This they said, tempting him, "that they might have to accuse him." They came to him then, not for any information about the nature of the crime, or of the punishment due to it; the crime had been distinctly specified in their law (the authority of which Jesus admitted, as well as they) and the sort of punishment had been distinctly specified, too: But they came with the insidious design of *tempting him;* that is, of drawing some answer from him, which might give them an occasion to accuse him, either to the people, or to the rulers of the Jewish state.

In what then did their temptation consist? Or, what crime was it, of which, by thus tempting him, they supposed they *might have to accuse him* to the Jews? The answer to this question will lead us into a proper view of our Lord's conduct on this occasion, and will

enable us to form a right judgment of the manner in which he disappointed the malice of his insidious tempters.

We find in the preceding chapter of St. John's Gospel, that *the Jews sought to kill him*, ver. 1.; and that, being alarmed at the progress of his doctrine among the people, *the Pharisees and chief priests had even sent their officers to take him by force*, ver. 32. But this project failing in the execution, by the growing favour of the people towards him, and by the strange impression which the doctrine of Jesus had made on those officers themselves, they found it expedient to try other and more indirect methods.

For this purpose, having taken a woman in adultery, they supposed they had now obtained a certain method of accomplishing their designs against him. They therefore bring her to him, and say, *Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now, Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?*

They concluded, that his answer to this question must be such as would give them a sure hold of him. For either it would be, that

the law of Moses was too severe; and then, they doubted not but he would fall a sacrifice to the zeal of the people themselves, from whose favour to him they had now the most dreadful apprehensions: or, if he justified this law of Moses, and encouraged the execution of it (and this conduct they had most reason to expect, from the known strictness of his life and doctrine, and from his professed reverence for the law), in that case, they would *have to accuse him* to the Jewish rulers, as taking to himself a civil and judicial character; or, rather to their Roman masters, as presuming to condemn to death an offender by his own proper authority; whereas *it was not lawful* for the Sanhedrim itself, but by express leave of the Roman governour, *to put any man to death*[b].

In short, either the people themselves would kill him on the spot, as a disparager and blasphemer of the law: or, he would be convicted of that capital crime, which their rulers wanted to fasten upon him, of making himself *a king*, and so incur the punishment of rebellion to the state.

[b] John xviii. 31.

Such being the profound artifice, as well as malice, of this *plot*, the situation of our Lord was very critical; and nothing but that divine wisdom, by which he spake, and which attended him in all conjunctures, could deliver him from it.

Let us see, then, what that wisdom suggested to him in his present perilous condition.

Instead of replying directly to their ensnaring question, "He stooped down, and with his "finger wrote on the ground, as though he "heared them not." His enemies, no doubt, considered this affected inattention as a poor subterfuge; or, rather, as an evident proof of his confusion, and inability to avoid the snare they had laid for him; and were ready to exult over him, as their certain prey, now fallen into their hands. They therefore repeat and press upon him their insulting question, urging him with much clamour to give them an immediate reply. "So when they continued asking him, "as the historian proceeds, he lift up himself, "and said to them, He that is without sin "among you, let him first cast a stone at her. "And, again he stooped down and wrote on "the ground."

The divinity of this answer can never be enough admired. He eluded by it, at once, the two opposite snares they had laid for him: he disconcerted all their hopes and triumphant expectations; and carried, at the same time, by the weight of this remonstrance, and the power which he gave to it, trouble, confusion and dismay into their affrighted consciences. Without speaking a word against the law, or taking to himself an authority which he had never claimed, and which did not belong to him, he turned their *temptation* on themselves; and instead of falling a victim to it, astonished them with the moral use he had made of it, and sent them away overwhelmed with shame, conviction, and self-contempt. For it follows, "They which heared [this re-" ply] being convicted by their own conscience, " went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, " even to the last; and Jesus was left alone, and " the woman standing in the midst."

This was no time, we see, for declaring his sense of the law of Moses, or giving his assent to the execution of it; which, upon the least signification of his mind, had certainly followed from the people (such was their united zeal for the law, and reverence for his opinion). His

present purpose and duty was to preserve himself from a captious and malicious question; but in such a manner as might consist with truth and innocence, and even with a tender concern for the moral state and condition of those questioners themselves.

No man will then expect, that, in such circumstances, he should expatiate, to the bystanders, on the heinous crime of adultery, objected to this unhappy woman: a point, concerning which they deserved not, from any virtuous indignation they had conceived against it, which they wanted not, from any ignorance they were under of its general nature, to be further satisfied or informed. They deserved, and they wanted to be made sensible of their own guilt and wickedness; and of this they derived from Jesus the fullest conviction. This was the sole purport of our Lord's reply to them: any other had been unseasonable and improper; and therefore no man will now be surprized to find the issue of this remarkable conference in the mild dismission which he gives to the unhappy person, who had furnished the occasion of it.

"When Jesus had lift up himself, and saw "none but the woman, he said to her, Wo-

"man, where are those thine accusers? Hath
"no man condemned thee? She said, No man,
"Lord: Jesus said to her, Neither do I con-
"demn thee; go, and sin no more."

The story concludes in the very manner we should now expect from the preceding circumstances. The accusers of the woman had withdrawn themselves; being convicted in their own minds, by the divine energy of Christ's reproof, of the very same crime, as some suppose, but certainly of some crime of equal malignity with that, which they had objected to this sinner. Their accusation had not been formed on their zeal for the honour of the law, or any antipathy they had conceived to the crime in question, but on the wicked purpose of oppressing an innocent man. When they failed of this end, they thought not of carrying the criminal before the proper judge, or of prosecuting the matter any further. To the question then which our Lord put to her, *hath no man condemned thee*, i. e. hath no man undertaken to see the sentence of the law carried into execution against thee? she answered, *No man, Lord. Neither do I*, continued Jesus, *condemn thee:* I, who am a private man, and have no authority to execute the law; I, who

*came not to judge the world, but to save the world,* I presume not to pass the sentence of death upon thee. I leave this matter to thine accusers, and to the proper judge. But what my office of a divine instructor of mankind requires, that I am ready to perform towards thee. Let me admonish thee, then, of thy great wickedness in committing this act, and exhort thee to repentance and a better life for the future; GO, AND SIN NO MORE!

Every thing here is so natural and so proper, so suitable to the circumstances of the case, and to the character and office of Jesus, that no shadow of blame can fall upon our Lord's conduct; nor has any man of sense, who considers the history, the least reason to conclude that any countenance is hereby given to the horrid sin of adultery. The mistake (if it be purely a mistake) has arisen from the ambiguous sense of the words, I CONDEMN THEE NOT; which may either signify, *I blame thee not,* or *I pass not the legal sentence of death upon thee.* But they cannot be here taken in the former sense, because Christ immediately charges the woman with her guilt, and bids her *sin no more:* Nay, they can only be taken in the latter sense, because that was the sense in which her ac-

cusers had *not condemned her*; for otherwise, by bringing her to Jesus, and by their vehement accusation of her, they had sufficiently testified their sense of her crime. When Jesus therefore said, *Neither do I condemn thee*, he could only be understood to mean, "Neither "do I take upon me to do that which thine ac-"cusers have omitted to do; that is, I do not "condemn thee to be put to death; a sen-"tence, which however thou mayest deserve "by the law of Moses, I have no authority to "pronounce against thee."

It should further be observed, that although the turn here given by Jesus to this famous accusation be indeed favourable to the criminal (and it could not be otherwise, consistently with his own safety, or even duty) yet it insinuates nothing against the propriety of a legal prosecution, nor gives the least countenance to the magistrate to abate of his rigid execution of the law which is entrusted to him. The mixture of mercy and humanity in Christ's decision is indeed very amiable and becoming in a private man; but had the question been, "Whether it were not fit to prosecute so great "a crime in a legal and regular manner," there is no reason to believe that his answer would

have given any check to the course of public justice.

We see then from the whole narrative, and from this comment upon it, That here is no encouragement given to any man to think more slightly of the sin of adultery, than other passages of the Gospel, and the reason of the thing, authorize him to do. The sin is unquestionably of the deepest dye; is one of the most flagrant that men can commit in society; and is equally and uniformly condemned by nature itself and by the Christian morals. If, besides *condemning*, that is, expressing his abhorrence of the sin, as Jesus did, he further made an adulterous multitude sensible of their iniquity and savage inhumanity in calling for the sudden and tumultuary punishment of one, who had deserved no worse than themselves, this benefit was accessary and incidental to the circumstances of the story; and, while it gives one occasion to admire the address and lenity of our divine master, takes nothing from the enormity of the crime itself, or from the detestation which he had of it. In short, one cannot well conceive how Jesus could have done more in the case, or have expressed his displeasure at the crime more plainly, unless he had become

a voluntary and officious informer against the criminal; which, considering the occasion and his own character, no man, I suppose, would think reasonable.

To conclude: if men would call to mind the purity and transcendant holiness of Christ's character, as evidenced in the general tenour of his history, and considered withall, that *never man spake as he spake*, they could not suspect him of giving any quarter to vice; and might be sure, that, if what he said on any occasion, had the least appearance of looking that way, the presumption must be without grounds, and could only arise from their not weighing and considering his words, so replete with all *wisdom*, as well as goodness, with a proper attention. The case before us, we have seen, is a memorable instance of this kind: and let all readers of the Gospel be taught by it, that to understand the Scriptures, and to cavil at them, are different things. Let them be warned by this example, not to impute their own follies to the sacred text, which they must first misinterpret, before they can abuse: And, above all, let them take heed how they *turn the Grace of God into licentiousness*; that is, how they seek to justify to themselves, or even palliate, their own cor-

ruptions, by their loose and negligent, if not perverse, glosses on the word of God; on that WORD, by which they must stand or fall; and which, like the divine Author of it, will surely in the end *be justified in* all *its sayings, and be clear when it is judged* [c].

[c] Rom. iii. 4.

# SERMON XXIII.

PREACHED MARCH 1, 1772.

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St. MATTHEW, xi. 29.

*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: And ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

THE moral quality recommended in the text, was little known and less esteemed[a] in the heathen world. Not that *humility*, in the Christian sense of the word, hath no foundation in natural reason: but heathen practice gave

[a] The words ταπεινὸς, and *humilis*, are observed to be generally, if not always, used in a bad sense by the Greek and Latin writers.

no countenance to this Virtue, and the pride of heathen philosophy would make no acquaintance with her.

She was left then to be acknowledged, for the first time, by Jesus of Nazareth, who knew the worth of this modest stranger; and therefore, as we see, recommends her to the notice and familiarity of his disciples in the most emphatic terms.

One would wonder how a virtue, so advantageously introduced into the Christian world, should be so much neglected by those who call themselves of it. But the reason is not difficult to be explained.

I. It was seen fit, for the ends of human virtue, that, in moulding the constitution of our common nature, a considerable degree of what may be called *a generous pride*, should be infused into it. Man, considered in one view, touches on the brutal creation; in another, he claims an affinity with God himself. To sustain this nobler part of his composition, the subject and source of all his diviner qualities, the adorable wisdom of the Creator saw good to implant in him a conscious sense of worth and dignity; that so a just self-esteem

might erect his thoughts and endeavours, and keep him from submitting too easily to what the baser half of his nature might exact from him.

Thus far INSTINCT goes: and, as yet, there is no blame. But then to moderate this instinct, (a blind power of itself, and capable of great excesses) to circumscribe its bounds, and direct its energies to their true end, REASON, a much higher faculty, was conferred on man; and his duty, thenceforth, was to give the reins to the natural sentiment, only so far as this supreme arbitress of human life allowed.

And hence his corruption and misery took its rise. He felt the *instinct* draw powerfully; and he would not take, or would not be at the pains to ask, the advice of *reason*, who was ready to tell him how far he might yield to it.

This wilfulness, or negligence, broke the balance of his moral nature; till *reason*, in this, as in so many other instances, was little regarded; and the instinctive sentiment of *self-esteem*, long since degenerated into lawless pride, was left to domineer as it would; universally, in the Pagan world, and, though checked

by this seasonable admonition of our great Master, too generally in the Christian.

This is the true account of the first and fundamental reason, which makes *humility* so rare a virtue, and of so difficult practice, even among the disciples of Jesus.

II. A *second* reason is almost as extensive as the former, because founded upon it; I mean, the power of *habit and institution.*

The bias of our minds towards a just self-esteem, not properly directed, presently became *pride:* and pride, from being a general, was easily mistaken for a *natural* principle; which would then, of course, be unconfined in its operation, and spread its influence through every quarter of human life.

Hence our earliest education is tinctured with this vicious self-esteem, and all our subsequent institutions are infected with it. It is cherished in the schools, under the name of emulation; and in the world at large, under that of ambition. Either sex, every age, every condition, is governed by it. The female world are called upon to value themselves; and the male world to assert their own dignity.

The young are applauded for shewing signs of spirit; and the old must vindicate themselves from contempt. The lower ranks of men are not to be trampled upon; and the higher, not to be affronted. Our camps encourage it, as the spring of courage: and our courts, as the source of honour.

Thus pride predominates every where: and even the moralist or preacher, who would give some check to this principle, is thought to have an abject mind himself, or not to know that world, which he pretends to inform and regulate.

What wonder then that this impatient and tyrannical passion, which has general custom, and therefore claims to have reason, on her side, should yield with reluctance even to the authority of religion?

III. *Another* cause, which contributes to the same effect, a partial one indeed, but of no small efficacy, where it prevails, is, perhaps, the *Gothic principle of honour*, deeply interwoven with most of our civil constitutions: a principle, in itself not friendly to Christian humility; but, as confederated with the other two principles before mentioned, what can it

do but inflame them both, and give an infinite force to all their operations?

In these three considerations then, we have the true account and history of *pride*, the bane of civil life, and the disgrace of our moral nature. It springs, first, from the *natural sentiment*, easily indulged too far: it is, next, fostered by *general habit*; and, in the end, made sacred by *fashion*. Thus, its tyranny grew up, and is now so complete, that *lowliness of mind* is ill looked upon even in the Christian world; and her offspring, *meekness*, (the more provoking of the two, as being that virtue drawn forth into outward act) seems in a way to be fairly dismissed from it.

It would hardly serve to reinstate these despised virtues in their pristine honours, to tell of their natures and conditions, to define their properties, and deliver the grounds of reason on which their pretensions are founded. Cold, abstracted philosophy, would do but little in this service. Besides, few persons want to be informed what humility is, or how becoming such a creature as man. And no informations, in the general way of reasoning, could be given with so much precision, but that a willing mind might find a way to mistake or pervert them.

'Tis well then that the text supplies another method of combating the universal pride of mankind. It calls upon us to contemplate, in the person of Jesus, the true and living form of *humility*; and holds out a solid, and suitable reward to the votaries of this divine virtue. Would ye know what it is to be *meek and lowly in heart? Learn of Jesus.* Do ye ask for what end ye should learn this lesson of him? the answer is direct and satisfactory, *Ye shall find rest to your souls.* These topics, then, must employ what remains of this discourse.

I. The particulars of Christ's humility may be seen at large in the history of his life. But they are summed up by the Apostle Paul in few words.

*Let this mind be in you,* says he to the Philippians, *which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God* [i. e. was in no haste to seize upon and assert his right of equality with him]; *but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion, as a man, he hum-*

*bled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross* [b].

Who, that hears these words, can have a doubt concerning the nature of humility, or concerning the duties of it? If heaven stooped to earth; if Jesus descended from the dignity, I do not say of an angel, or an archangel, but of God himself, to the abject state of man; if he humbled himself to the lowest condition of that state; veiled all his glories in the form of a servant; in that form administered to our infirmities and necessities; bore all the scorn, the contradiction, the contumely of injurious men; and even submitted himself to death, the ignominious death of the cross, for their sake — If *this mind was in Christ Jesus*, who but must see, that the greatest of mankind may well descend from all his real or fancied eminence, for the service of his brother? may easily forego the little advantage, which his birth, his rank, his wealth, his learning, or his parts, may seem to give him over his fellows, when an act of charity is to be performed by him; when the distresses, the infirmities, nay the vices of humanity, may be relieved, and covered, and corrected, by such conde-

[b] Philipp. ii. 5. 8.

scension? To stoop for such ends is almost pride itself: and to emulate such a pattern, is scarce humility, but glory.

Nor think, that this humility requires of you more than reason requires. You may suppress your pride, without giving up necessary self-defence. Ye may be *meek and lowly in heart*, without being unjust to yourselves, or imprudent. When your essential interests are concerned, ye may assert them with firmness, and even with spirit, in all ways, which good sense allows, or true wisdom recommends. But let not every petty injury, much less any fancied injury, be presently avenged; let not little neglects or discourtesies be hastily resented; overlook many injuries, if not considerable; nay, and many considerable injuries, if they be but tolerable. Think not that your dignity will suffer by such connivance. The true dignity of man, is the performance of his duty. Or, if some indignity be sustained, consider on whose account, and by whose command ye suffer it. Consider, that He, whose dignity was infinitely above yours, submitted to *every* indignity, and for your sake. The authority of your divine Master is nothing, if it cannot bind you in any instance to bear his *yoke*: And to what end is the example of your divine

Saviour set before you, if ye resolve, on no account, to *take up your cross and follow him*[c]?

But, because our compassionate Lord saw how uneasy this precept would be to the indulged and inveterate pride of his followers, he has therefore condescended to assure them that their obedience to it will, even in this world, be attended with a suitable reward. *Ye shall find rest to your souls.* And this

II. Is the other topic, which I engaged to insist upon, in this discourse.

The great objection to the virtues of *meekness and humility*, is, that the practice of them will put us to some present pain in resisting the impulse of our disordered passions. It will do so. Nature prompts us to repel an injury; and that nature, vitiated and depraved, is in haste to repel it with indignation, and even fury. To give way to the impetuous sentiment, would give us immediate ease; and to suppress it, till the practice becomes habitual, will cost us some throws and agitation of mind. To counteract this instant disquiet, a recom-

[c] Matthew xvi. 24.

pence is proposed, exactly suited to the trial. Our mind is discomposed, for the instant, by the struggle we have to make with the incensed passion: When that is over, it settles again into a full and permanent tranquillity. *We find rest,* as the text speaks, *to our souls:* we have the purest peace within, and have no disturbance of it to apprehend, from without.

1. The uneasiness which *pride* engenders, receives, as I said, some present relief, from the free course of that passion. But see the consequence of giving way to it. Disgust, remorse, fear, and hate, succeed to the indulgence of this fiery sentiment, I mean, when it proceeds so far as to acts of revenge. But, if it stop short of this extreme, still the mind, by nourishing its resentments, and brooding over the idea of a supposed indignity, hurts its own peace; grows sore and fretful, and suspicious; and, though it be somewhat flattered by the first tumultuous effort of its indignation, which looks like courage and high spirit; yet, the briskness of this sensation soon goes off, and flattens into a sullen gloom of thought, the bane of every selfish, as well as social enjoyment.

It is much otherwise with the *meek and lowly in heart.* They never retaliate injuries, and seldom resent them. They either feel not the stroke of them; or, if they do, the wound is instantly healed by the balsamic virtue of their own minds. But, indeed, a man, well disciplined in the school of humility, receives but few injuries, for he *suspects* none; it being, I think, true, that, for one real injury done us by others, a hundred such things, as we call by that name, are only bred in our own captious and distempered imaginations. And then, for those few injuries which he actually receives, they are easily slighted or forgotten by him; because he sees them only in their true shape and size, and not as magnified by an extravagant opinion of his own worth, and as extravagant a contempt of the aggressor. He knows his own infirmities, and can allow for those of other men. If they are petulant or unjust, he, perhaps, has been inobservant or imprudent: besides, he never thought himself entitled to any special respect, and therefore wonders the less, if no great ceremony has been used towards him. To these suggestions of humanity, he adds those of *religion.* He knows what his Master enjoins, and he remembers on what terms the injunction is pressed upon him. And thus, though the in-

dignity seem great, he easily excuses one half of it, and forgives the other. The issue is, that he finds *rest* in his own soul, which the proud man never does: so that, as to internal peace, the advantage is clearly on the side of meekness and humility. But then,

2. As to *external peace*, the matter may be thought more problematical. "For that softness of mind, which religion calls *humility*, invites, it is said, and multiplies injuries. Forgive one insult, and you draw upon you a hundred more: so that, if humility be a virtue, it is never likely to be out of breath for want of exercise and employment. In a word, the world is so base, that there is no keeping it in respect, but by *fear*: and how is that needful sentiment to be impressed on the minds of injurious men, in those numberless cases which civil justice cannot reach, but by a quick resentment and personal high spirit?"

Such is the language of those who have learned their ethics of the world, and not of the Gospel. But let us see what there is in the allegation itself.

*To connive at one indignity, is*, they say, *the ready way to invite another*. It may be

so, in some rare cases, when we have to do with singularly base and ungenerous natures; but even then, I think, chiefly, if not solely, when that connivance is joined with imprudence or folly: and then it is not humility should bear the blame, but our own indiscretion. Besides, the question is concerning a general rule of conduct: and this rule may be a fit and reasonable one, though it admit, as most rules do, of some exceptions.

Again, though a wise and good man will frequently suppress, and always moderate his resentment, yet neither reason nor the religion of Jesus requires, that in no case whatsoever should we be actuated by that principle. The principle itself, as I have shewn, is a natural one, and under due restraint may serve to good purposes; one of which, perhaps, is to give a check to overbearing insolence and oppression, I mean when it rises to a certain degree and exceeds certain bounds. Even our blessed Lord, who was meekness itself, thought fit on some occasions to express a very strong resentment; as, when he upbraided the Pharisees in no gentle terms, but, in a just indignation at their malice, went so far as to brand them with the bitter names of *vipers and serpents*, and to menace

them with the flames of *hell*[d]. So that meekness and resentment are not absolutely incompatible; though the danger of exceeding in this last quality is so great, that the general rule both of reason and Christianity, is to cultivate meekness in ourselves, and to restrain our resentments.

"But, if exceptions be allowed in any case, the rule, it will be said, becomes of no use; for that pride and passion will find an exception in every case." If they should, they must answer for themselves. In all moral matters, something, nay much, must be left to the fairness and honesty of the mind. Without this principle, the plainest rule of life may be evaded or abused: and with it, even that hard saying, of *loving our enemies*, which is near of kin to this of *meekness*, is easily understood, and may be reasonably applied.

"Still, the rule, it is said, must be an improper one; for that the world, not some few persons, but mankind in general, are only to be kept in order by *force and fear*." So far as there is truth in this observation, the civil sword, in every country, supplies that needful

[d] Matth. xxiii. 33.

restraint. But in the general commerce between man and man, in all offices of civility and society, that is, in cases where the stronger passions and more important interests of men are not directly concerned, as they are in what relates to property and power, the observation is clearly not true. Here, pride is the predominant vice of mankind. And pride is naturally softened and disarmed by placability and meekness. The good humour of the world is easily and most effectually maintained by mutual concessions and reciprocal civilities: for pride, having a mixture of generosity in it, yields to these, and loses all the fierceness of its nature. So that they, who bring this charge against the world, calumniate their kind, and either shew that they have kept ill company; or, as I rather suspect, have never tried the experiment, which they say is so hopeless. Let them learn to think more favourably, that is, more justly, of human nature. We are passionate, infirm creatures, indeed; but still men, and not fiends. Let them set the example of that *humility*, which they affect to think so unpromising a guard against injuries: and I dare assure them they will generally find themselves better defended by it, than by any resentment or high spirit which they can possibly exert.

Lastly, I would observe, that, if in some rare instances, and in places, especially, where fashion has made resentment highly creditable, this practice be found inconvenient, the rule is not to be set aside on that account. The authority of the legislator should exact obedience to it; and the inconvenience will be amply compensated by other considerations. We shall have the merit of testifying the sincerity of our religion, by giving to God and man so eminent a proof of it; and, in due time, we shall have our reward.

To conclude: in this and all other cases, we shall do well to *learn of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart.* His authority, his example, his affectionate call upon us in the words of the text, are powerful motives to the practice of this duty. And for the rest, we have seen, that it leads directly to *peace and quiet,* in our intercourse with each other; or, if the perverseness of man should sometimes disappoint us in this expectation, that it will certainly and infallibly *yield rest to our own souls.*

# SERMON XXIV.

PREACHED APRIL 30, 1769.

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LUKE xvi. 14.

*And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all those things, and they derided him.*

BUT what then were *those things* which our Lord had said in the hearing of the Pharisees, and for which they derided him?

Had he been inveighing against the vice of covetousness in any unreasonable manner? Had he carried the opposite virtue to an extreme, as some moralists have done? Had he told the Pharisees that the possession, and much more the enjoyment of riches, was, universally, and under all circumstances, unlawful? Had he

pressed it as a matter of conscience upon them, to divest themselves of their wealth, and to embrace an absolute and voluntary poverty? Had he even gone so far as to advise these Pharisees, as he once did a rich man, to *sell what they had and give it to the poor, and then take up the cross and follow him*[a]?

Alas, no. He had been saying none of *these things*. He did not think well enough of the Pharisees to give this last counsel of exalted charity to *them*; a counsel, which he had addressed to one whom he loved, to one who was a virtuous man as well as rich, and who wanted only this *one thing*, to make him perfect.

And as for those other precepts, which would have implied, that riches were unlawful in themselves, and the possession of them a crime, he was too sober a moralist to address a lecture of this sort to any of his hearers.

The truth is, he had only been advising rich men to employ their wealth in such a way as should turn to the best account, to *make themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteous-*

[a] Mark x. 21.

*ness;* that is, such friends, as should be able to repay them with interest, and, when these houses of clay are overturned, should *receive them into everlasting habitations:* and, to give this advice the greater weight with them, he had concluded his discourse with saying, that such conduct was even necessary, if they aspired to this reward, for that they *could not serve God and mammon;* that is, they could not serve *God* acceptably, unless they withdrew their service from *mammon* in all those cases, in which the commands of two such different masters interfered with each other.

Such, and so reasonable was the doctrine which Jesus had been delivering to the Pharisees. And how then could it provoke their *derision?*

The text answers this question—THEY WERE COVETOUS. Their life was a contradiction to this doctrine, and therefore they found it unreasonable, and even ridiculous.

Nor let it be thought, that this illusion is peculiar to avarice. It is familiar to vice of every kind, to scorn reproof; to make light of the doctrine, which condemns it; and, when it cannot confute, to deride the teacher.

So that the text affords this general observation, "That, when the heart is corrupted by "any vice, it naturally breeds a disposition to "unreasonable mirth and ridicule."

And, because this levity of mind, in its turn, corrupts the heart still further, it may be of use to open to you, more particularly, *the sources of irreligious scorn;* to let you see from how base an origin it springs; how it rises, indeed, on the subversion of every principle, by which a virtuous man is governed, and by which there is hope that a vicious man may be reclaimed.

Now ye will easily apprehend how the sinner comes to cultivate in himself this miserable talent, if ye reflect; *how much he is concerned to avoid the* EVIDENCE *of moral truth; how insensible he chuses to be to the* DIFFERENCES *of moral sentiment; how studiously he would keep out of sight the* CONSEQUENCES *of moral action:* And if ye consider, withal, how well adapted *the way of ridicule* is, to answer all these purposes.

I. FIRST, then, the sinner is much disposed to withhold his attention from *the evidence of*

*moral truth*; and the way of ridicule favours this bad disposition.

When a moral lesson is addressed to us, it is but a common piece of respect we owe the teacher of it, and indeed ourselves, to see what the ideas are of which the doctrine is made up; to consider whether there be a proper coherence between those ideas; whether what is affirmed in the proposition be consonant to truth and reason, or not. If upon this enquiry we find that the affirmation is well founded, either from our immediate perception of the dependency between the ideas themselves, or from the evidence of some remoter principle, with which it is duly connected, we admit it thenceforth as a truth, and are obliged, if we would act in a reasonable manner, to pay it that regard which may be due to its importance. This is the duty of a rational hearer in the school of instruction: and this, the process of the mind, in discharging that duty. But this work of the understanding, it is plain, requires attention and seriousness; *attention*, to apprehend the meaning of the proposition delivered to us, and *seriousness*, to judge of its truth and moment.

Indeed, if the result of our enquiry be, that the proposition is unmeaning, or false, or fri-

volous, we of course reject it, and, perhaps, with some contempt: but then this contempt is subsequent to the inquiry, and would itself be ridiculous, if it went before it.

It is apparent, then, what reason demands in the case. But the precipitancy of the mind is such, that it often concludes before it understands, and, what is worse, contemns what it has not examined. This last folly is more especially chargeable on those who are under the influence of some inveterate prejudice, or prevailing passion. For, when the moral instruction pressed upon us, directly opposes a principle we will not part with, or contradicts an inclination we resolve to cherish, the very repugnancy of the doctrine to our notions or humours creates disgust: and then, to spare ourselves the trouble of inquiry, or to countenance the hasty persuasion that we have no need to inquire at all, we very naturally express that disgust in contempt and ridicule.

I explain myself by the instance in the text. Jesus had said, *Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* The Pharisees, who heard him say this, had taken their resolution, *to serve mammon;* and they had, it seems, a principle of their own, on which they presumed

to satisfy themselves, that they, likewise, *served God.* Now, this aphorism of our Lord coming against these prejudices, they had not the patience to consider what truth there was in the assertion; what it was *to serve God,* and what it was *to serve mammon;* and what inconsistency there was between these two services. This way of inquiry, which reason prescribes, was too slow for these impatient spirits; and, besides, was contrary to their fixed purpose of adhering to their old principles and practices. They therefore take a shorter method of setting aside the obnoxious proposition. They conclude hastily, that their service of mammon was, some how or other, made consistent with their service of God, by virtue of their *long prayers.* And, for the rest, they condescend not to reason upon the point at all: to get quit of this trouble, or rather, to conceal from themselves, if possible, the deformity of their practice, they slur an important lesson over with an air of negligent raillery, and think it sufficient to *deride* the teacher of it.

Ye see then how naturally it comes to pass that the way of ridicule is taken up by the sinner, to avoid the trouble and confusion which must needs arise from a serious attention to the evidence of moral truth.

II. It serves equally in the next place, to sooth and flatter his corruption, by keeping him insensible, as he would chuse to be, to *the differences of moral sentiment.*

The divine wisdom has so wonderfully contrived human nature, that there needs little more in moral matters, than plainly and clearly to represent any instruction to the mind, in order to procure its assent to it. Whatever the instruction be, whether it affirm this conduct to be virtuous, or that vicious, if the mind be in its natural state, it more than sees, it feels, the truth or falshood of it. The appeal lies directly to the heart, and to certain corresponding sentiments of right and wrong, instantly and unavoidably excited by the moral proposition [b].

It is true, the vivacity of these sentiments may be much weakened by habits of vice; but they must grow into a great inveteracy indeed, before they can altogether extinguish the natu-

[b] For it is with propositions, as with *characters,* in relation to which the language of the true moralist is: "Explica, atque excute intelligentiam tuam, ut videas quæ sit in eâ species, forma, et notio viri boni."

Cic. de Off. l. III. c. 20.

ral perception. The only way to prevent this sensibility from taking place in a mind, not perfectly abandoned, is to keep the moral truth itself out of sight; or, which comes to the same thing, to misrepresent it. For, being then not taken for what it is, but for something else, it is the same thing as if the truth itself had not been proposed to us. But now this power of misrepresentation is that faculty in which ridicule excells. Nothing is easier for it than to distort a reasonable proposition, or to throw some false light of the fancy upon it. The soberest truth is then travestied into an apparent falshood; and, instead of exciting the moral sentiment which properly belongs to it, only serves, under this disguise, to provoke the scorner's mirth on a phantom of his own raising.

The instance in the text will again illustrate this observation.

Had the Pharisees seen, that, *to serve God* implies an universal obedience to all his laws, and that, *to serve mammon* implies an equal submission to all the maxims of the world, and that these laws and these maxims are, in numberless cases, directly contrary to each other, they would then have seen our Lord's obser-

vation in its true light; and they could not have helped feeling the propriety of the conduct recommended to them. But the sentiments arising out of this truth, would have given no small disturbance to men, who were determined to act in defiance of them. To avoid this inconvenience, they had only to put a false gloss on the words of Jesus; to suppose, for instance, that by serving God was meant, to *make long prayers*, and by serving mammon, to make a *reasonable provision for their families*; and, then, where was the inconsistency of two such services? In this way of understanding the text, nothing is easier than *to serve God and mammon.* And thus, by substituting a proposition of their own, in the room of that which he had delivered, they escape from his reproof, and even find means to divert themselves with it.

III. But, lastly, a vicious man is not more concerned to obscure the evidence of moral truth, and to suppress in himself the differences of moral sentiment, than he is to keep out of sight *the consequences of moral action*: and what so likely as ridicule to befriend him also in this project.

When the sinner looks forward into the effects of a vicious life, he sees so much misery

springing up before him, even in this world, and so dreadful a recompence reserved for him in another, that the prospect must needs be painful to him. He has his choice, indeed, whether to stop, or proceed, in his evil course; but, if he resolve to proceed, one cannot think it strange that he should strive to forget, both what he is about, and whither he is going. And, if other expedients fail him, he very naturally takes refuge in a forced intemperate pleasantry. For the very effort to be witty occupies his attention, and gratifies his vanity. A little crackling mirth, besides, diverts and entertains him; and, though his case will not bear reasoning upon, yet a lively jest shall pass upon others, and sometimes upon himself, for the soundest reason.

This is the true account of that disposition to ridicule, which the world so commonly observes in bad men, and sometimes mistakes for an argument of their tranquillity, when it is, in truth, an evident symptom of their distress. For they would forget themselves, in this noisy mirth; just as children laugh out, to keep up their spirits in the dark.

Let me alledge the case in the text once more, to exemplify this remark.

When our Lord reproved the Pharisees for their covetousness, and admonished them how impossible it was *to serve God and mammon*, the weight of this remonstrance should, in all reason, have engaged their serious attention: and then they would have seen how criminal their conduct was, in *devouring widows houses*, while yet they pretended a zeal for *the house of God*; and being led by the principles of their sect to admit a future existence, it was natural for them, under this conviction, to expect the just vengeance of their crimes.

But vice had made them ingenious, and taught them how to elude this dreadful conclusion. They represented to themselves their reprover in a ridiculous light; probably as one of those moralists, who know nothing of the world, and outrage truth and reason in their censures of it: or, they affected to see him in this light, in order to break the force of his remonstrance, and insinuate to the by-standers, that it merited no other confutation than that of neglect. They did, then, as vicious men are wont to do; they resolved not to consider the consequences of their own conduct; and supported themselves in this resolution by *deriding* the person, who, in charity, would have led them to their duty.

Thus it appears how naturally the way of ridicule is employed by those who determine not to comply with the rules of reason and religion. They are solicitous to keep *the evidence of moral truth* from pressing too closely upon them: they would confound and obliterate, if they could, *the differences of moral sentiment:* they would overlook, if possible, the *consequences of moral action:* and nothing promises so fair to set them at ease, in these three respects, as to cultivate that turn of mind, which obscures truth, hardens the heart, and stupifies the understanding. For such is the proper effect of dissolute mirth; the mortal foe to reason, virtue, and to common prudence.

I have shewn you this very clearly in the case of one vice, the vice of avarice, as exemplified by the Pharisees in the text. But, as I said, every other vice is equally disingenuous, and for the same reason. Tell the ambitious man, in the language of Solomon, that *by humility and the fear of the Lord, cometh honour*[c]; and he will loudly deride his instructor: or, tell the voluptuous man, in the language of St. Paul, *that he, who liveth in pleasure, is dead while he liveth*[d]; and you may certainly expect the same treatment.

[c] Prov. ii. 4. [d] 1 Tim. v. 6.

It is not, that vague and general invectives against vice will always be thus received: but let the reproof, as that in the text, be pressing and poignant, let it *come home to men's bosoms*, and penetrate, by its force and truth, the inmost foldings and recesses of conscience, and see if the man, who is touched by your reproof, and yet will not be reclaimed by it; see, I say, if he be not carried, by a sort of instinct, to repel your charitable pains with scorn and mockery. Had Jesus instructed the Pharisees *to pray and fast often*; or had he exhorted them, in general terms, to keep the law and to serve God; they had probably given him the hearing with much apparent composure: but when he spoke against *serving mammon*, whom they idolized: and still more, when he told these hypocritical worldlings, that their service of mammon did not, and could not consist with God's service, to which they so much pretended; then it was that they betook themselves to their arms: they *heared these things*, and because *they were covetous*, they *derided* their teacher.

If this be a just picture of human nature, it may let us see how poor a talent that of ridicule is, both in its origin, and application. For, when employed in moral and religious matters,

we may certainly pronounce of it, That it springs from vice, and means nothing else but the support of it. Should not the scorner himself, then, reflect on what every other man sees, "That his mirth implies guilt, and that he only laughs, because he dares not be serious?"

But Solomon [e] has long since read the destiny of him, who would reprove men of this character. It will be to better purpose, therefore, to warn the young and unexperienced against the contagion of vicious scorn; by which many have been corrupted, on whom vice itself, in its own proper form, would have made no impression. For the modesty of virtue too easily concludes, that what is much ridiculed must, itself, be ridiculous: and, when this conclusion is taken up, reflexion many times comes too late to correct the mischiefs of it. Let those, then, who have not yet seated themselves *in the chair of the scorner*, consider, that ridicule is but the last effort of baffled vice to keep itself in countenance; that it betrays a corrupt turn of mind, and only serves to promote that corruption. Let them understand, that this faculty is no argument of superior

[e] Prov. ix. 8.

sense, rarely of superior wit; and that it proves nothing but the profligacy, or the folly of him, who affects to be distinguished by it. Let them, in a word, reflect, that virtue and reason love to be, and can afford to be, serious: but that vice and folly are undone, if they let go their favourite habit of scorn and derision.

# SERMON XXV.

PREACHED JUNE 25, 1775.

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ECCLESIASTES V. 10.

*He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver.*

IF a preacher on these words should set himself to declaim against silver, he would probably be but ill-heared, and would certainly go beside the meaning of his text.

SILVER (or gold) is only an instrument of exchange; a sign of the price which things bear in the commerce of life. This instrument is of the most necessary use in society.

Without it, there would be no convenience of living, no supply of our mutual wants, no industry, no civility, I had almost said, no virtue among men.

The author of the text was clearly of this mind; since, on many occasions, he makes wealth the reward of wisdom, and poverty, of folly; and since he laboured all his life, and with suitable success, to multiply gold and silver in his dominions, beyond the example of all former, and indeed succeeding, kings of the Jewish state.

The precious metals, then, (both for the reason of the thing, and the authority of Solomon) shall preserve their lustre unsullied, and their honours unimpared by me. Poets and satirists have, indeed, execrated those, who tore the entrails of the earth for them; and, provoked by the general abuse of them, have seemed willing that they should be sent back to their beds again. But sober moralists hold no such language; and are content that they remain above ground, and shine out in the face of the sun.

Still (for I come now to the true meaning of my text) good and useful things may be

OVER-RATED, or MISAPPLIED; and, in either way, may become hurtful to us. *He, that,* in the emphatic language of the preacher, LOVETH *silver,* certainly offends in one of these ways, and probably in both: and, when he does so, it will be easy to make good the royal denunciation — that *he shall not be* SATISFIED *with it.*

1. Now, wealth is surely over-rated, when, instead of regarding it only as the means of procuring a reasonable enjoyment of our lives, we dote upon it for its own sake, and make it the end, or chief object of our pursuits: when we sacrifice, not only ease and leisure, (which, though valuable things, are often well recompensed by the pleasures of industry and activity), but health and life to it: when we *grieve nature*[a], to gratify this fantastic passion; and give up the social pleasures, the true pleasures of humanity, for the sordid satisfaction of seeing ourselves possessed of an abundance, which we never mean to enjoy: above all, when we purchase wealth at the expence of our innocence; when we prefer it to a good name, and a clear conscience; when we suffer it to interfere with our most important con-

[a] Queis humana sibi doleat natura negatis.

Hor. I. S. i. 75.

cerns, those of piety and religion; and when, for the sake of it, we are contented to forego the noblest hopes, the support and glory of our nature, the hopes of happiness in a future state.

When the false glitter of *silver (of which the owner*, as Solomon says, *has*, and proposes to himself, *no other good, but that of beholding it with his eyes*[b]) imposes upon us at this rate, how should our reasonable nature find any true or solid *satisfaction* in it!

"But the mere act of acquiring and accumulating wealth is, it will be said, the miser's pleasure, of which himself, and no other, is the proper judge; and a certain confused notion of the uses, to which it may serve, though he never actually puts it to any, is enough to justify his pursuit of it."

Be it so, then: But is there no better pleasure for him to aim at, and which he loses by following this; and although *a man's ways*, we are told, *be right in his own eyes*[c]; yet, is there no difference in them, and do not some of them lead through much trouble to

[b] Eccles. v. 11. [c] Prov. xvi. 25.

disappointment and *death?* And is there not a presumption, a certainty, that the way of the *miser* is of this sort? when his very name may admonish him of the light in which the common sense of mankind regards his pursuit of untasted opulence; and when he finds, by experience, that his unnatural appetite for it is always encreasing, be the plenty never so great which is set before him. But,

2. Wealth may be MISAPPLIED, as well as over-rated, and generally is so, in the most offensive manner, by those, who think there are no pleasures, which it cannot command. For, although the miser has the worse name in the world, yet the spendthrift (since a certain alliance, which has taken place between luxury and avarice) possibly deserves our indignation more.

But ye shall judge for yourselves. Are not riches, let me ask, sadly misapplied, when, after having been pursued and seized upon, with more than a miser's fury, they are suddenly let go again, on all the wings[d] of prodigality and folly? which scatter their precious load, not on modest merit, or virtuous in-

[d] Prov. xxiii. 5.

dustry, or suffering innocence, but on the flatterers of pride, the retainers of pomp, the panders of pleasure; in a word, on those miscreants, who imped these harpies, and sent them forth, for the annoyance of mankind.

And well are these spendthrifts repaid for their good service. For this profusion brings on more pains and penalties, than I am able to express; disappointment, regret, disgust, and infamy; and not uncommonly, in the train of these, that tremendous spectre to a voluptuous man, *Poverty*: or, if the source, which feeds this whirlpool of riotous expence, be yet unexhausted, and flow copiously, these waters have that baleful quality, that they inflame, instead of quenching, the drinker's thirst. All his natural appetites grow nice and delicate; and ten thousand artificial ones are created, and become more vexatious to him, than any that are of nature's growth. The idolater of riches, the infatuated lover of *silver*, now finds, that the power he serves, the mistress he adores, yields him no other fruit of all his assiduity, but self-abhorrence and distraction; the loss of all virtuous feelings; and numberless clamorous desires, which give him no truce of their importunity, and are

incapable, by any gratification, of being quieted and assuaged.

So true is the observation, that *he, who, loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver!* For, either the passion grows upon us, when the object is not enjoyed; or, if it be, a new force is given to it, and a legion of other passions, as impatient and unmanageable as the original one, start up out of the enjoyment itself.

I know the lovers of money are not easily made sensible of this fatal alternative. They think, that this, or that sum, will fill[e] all their wishes, and make them as rich, and as happy, as they desire to be. But they presently feel their mistake; and yet rarely find out, that the way to content lies through self-command, and that to have enough of any thing which this world affords, we must be careful not to grasp at too much of it.

On the entrance into life, higher and more generous motives usually excite the better part of mankind to labour in those professions, that are accounted liberal. But, as they proceed

[e] Si hoc est *explere*, quod statim profundas.
Cic. Phil. ii.

in their course, interest, which was always one spur to their industry, infixes itself deeply into their minds, and stimulates them more sensibly than any other. It can scarce be otherwise, considering the influence of example; the experience they have, or think they have, of the advantages, that attend encreasing wealth; the fashion of the times, which indulges, or, as we easily persuade ourselves, requires refined, and therefore expensive, pleasures; and, above all, the selfishness of the human mind, which is, and, for wise reasons, was intended to be a powerful spring of action in us.

Thus there are several adventitious, shall we call them? or natural inclinations, which prompt us to the pursuit of riches; and I would not be so rigid, as to insist on the total suppression of them.

Let then the fortune, or the honour (for both are included in the magical word *silver)* which eminent worth may propose to itself, be among the inducements which erect the hopes, and quicken the application, of a virtuous man. But let him know withal (and I am in no pain for the effect, which this premature knowledge may have upon him) that the application, and

not the object, is that in which he will find his account; just as the pursuit, and not the game, is the true reward of the chace. He who thinks otherwise, and reckons that affluence is content, or grandeur, happiness, will have leisure, if he attain to either, to rectify his opinion, and to see that he had made a very false estimate of human life.

And, now, having thus far commented on my text, I will take leave, for once, to step beyond it, and shew you, in few words (for many cannot be necessary on so plain a subject) *where* and *how* satisfaction may be found.

In the abundance of *silver*, it does not, and cannot lie; nor yet in a cynical contempt of it: but, in few and moderate desires; in a correct taste of life, which consults nature more than fancy in the choice of its pleasures; in rejecting imaginary wants, and keeping a strict hand on those that are real; in a sober use of what we possess, and no further concern about more than what may engage us, by honest means, to acquire it; in considering who, and what we are[f]; that we are creatures of a day, to whom long desires and immeasur-

[f] Quid sumus, et quidnam victuri gignimur. PERSIUS.

able projects are very ill suited; that we are reasonable creatures, who should make a wide difference between what seems to be, and what is important; that we are accountable creatures, and should be more concerned to make a right use of what we possess, than to enlarge our possessions; that, above all, we are Christians, who are expected to sit loose to a transitory world, to extend our hopes to another life, and to qualify ourselves for it.

In this way, and with these reflections, we shall see things in a true light, and shall either not desire abundant wealth, or shall understand its true value. The strictest morality, and even our divine religion, lays no obligation upon us to profess poverty. We are even required to be industrious in our several callings and stations, and are, of course, allowed to reap the fruits, whatever they be, of an honest industry. Yet it deserves our consideration, that wealth is always a snare, and therefore too often a curse; that, if virtuously obtained, it affords but a moderate satisfaction at best; and that, if we WILL be rich, that is, resolve by any means, and at all events, to be so, we *pierce ourselves through with many sorrows* [g];

[g] 1 Tim. vi. 9.

that it even requires more virtue to manage, as we ought, a great estate, than to acquire it, in the most reputable manner; that affluent, and, still more, enormous wealth secularizes the heart of a Christian too much, indisposes him for the offices of piety, and too often (though it may seem strange) for those of humanity; that it inspires a sufficiency and self-dependance, which was not designed for mortal man; an impatience of complying with the rules of reason, and the commands of religion; a forgetfulness of our highest duties, or an extreme reluctance to observe them.

In a word, when we have computed all the advantages, which a flowing prosperity brings with it, it will be our wisdom to remember, that its disadvantages are also great[h]; greater than surely we are aware of, if it be true, as our Lord himself assures us it is; *that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven*[i].

Yet, *with God* (our gracious Master adds) *all things are possible.* I return, therefore,

[h] Ardua res hæc est, opibus non tradere mores,
Et cùm tot Crœsos vicĕris, esse Numam.
MARTIAL, XI. vi.

[i] Matth. xix. 23.

to the doctrine with which I set out, and conclude; that riches are not evil in themselves; that the moderate desire of them is not unlawful; that a right use of them is even meritorious. But then you will reflect on what the nature of things, as well as the voice of Solomon, loudly declares, that *he who loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver;* that the capacity of the human mind is not filled with it; that, if we pursue it with ardour, and make it the sole or the chief object of our pursuit, it never did, and never can yield a true and permanent satisfaction; that, if *riches encrease,* it is our interest, as well as duty, *not to set our hearts upon them* [k]; and that, finally, we are so to employ the riches, we any of us have, with temperance and sobriety, with mercy and charity, as to *make ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness* (of the mammon, which usually deserves to be so called) that, *when we fail* (when our lives come, as they soon will do, to an end) *they may receive us into everlasting habitations* [l].

[k] Ps. lxii. 10. [l] Luke xvi. 9.

# SERMON XXVI.

PREACHED FEBRUARY 21, 1773.

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1 Cor. vi. 20.

*Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

THE words, as the expression shews, are an inference from the preceding part of the Apostle's discourse. The occasion was this. He had been reasoning, towards the close of this chapter, against fornication, or the vice of impurity; to which the Gentiles, in their unbelieving state, had been notoriously addicted; and for which the Corinthians (to whom he writes) were, even among the Gentiles themselves, branded to a proverb.

The topics, he chiefly insists upon, are taken, not from nature, but the principles of our holy religion, from the right and property, which God hath in Christians. By virtue of their profession, their bodies and souls are appropriated to him. THEREFORE, says he, *glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

To apprehend all the force of this conclusion, it will be proper to look back to the arguments themselves; to consider distinctly the substance of them, and the manner in which they are conducted.

This double attention will give us cause to admire, not the logick only, but the address, of the learned Apostle. I say, the *address;* which the occasion required: for, notwithstanding that no sin is more opposite to our holy religion, and that therefore St. Paul, in his epistles to the Gentile converts, gives it no quarter, yet, as became the wisdom and sanctity of his character, he forgets not of what, and to whom, he writes.

The vice itself is of no easy reprehension: not, for want of arguments against it, which are innumerable and irresistible; but from the

reverence which is due to one's self and others. An Apostle, especially, was to respect his own dignity. He was, besides, neither to offend the innocent, nor the guilty. Unhappily, these last, who needed his plainest reproof, had more than the delicacy of innocence about them, and were, of all men, the readiest to take offence. For so it is, the licentious of all times have seared consciences, and tender apprehensions. It alarms them to hear what they have no scruple to commit.

The persons addressed were, especially, to be considered. These were Corinthians: that is, a rich commercial people, voluptuous and dissolute. They were, besides, wits and reasoners, rhetoricians and philosophers; for under these characters they are represented to us. And all these characters required the Apostle's attention. As a people addicted to pleasure, and supported in the habits of it by abounding wealth, they were to be awakened out of their lethargy, by an earnest and vehement expostulation: as pretending to be expert in the arts of reasoning, they were to be convinced by strict argument: and, as men of quick rhetorical fancies, a reasoner would find his account in presenting his argument to them through some apt and lively image.

Let us see, then, how the Apostle acquits himself in these nice circumstances.

After observing that the sin he had warned the Corinthians to avoid, was *a sin against their own body*; that is, was an abuse and defilement of it, he proceeds, "*What! know ye "not that your body is the temple of the Holy "Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of "God? And ye are not your own; for ye "are bought with a price; therefore, glorify "God in your body, and in your spirit, which "are God's.*"

The address, we see, is poignant; the reasoning, close; and the expression, oratorical. The vehemence of his manner could not but take their attention: his argumentation, as being founded on Christian principles and ideas, must be conclusive to the persons addressed; and, as conveyed in remote and decent figures, the delicacy of their imaginations is respected by it.

The whole deserves to be opened and explained at large. Such an explanation, will be the best discourse I can frame on this subject.

I. First, then, the Apostle asks, *What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?*—This question refers to that great Christian principle, that we live *in the communion of the Holy Ghost*[a]; not, in the sense in which we *all live and move and have our being in God;* but in a special and more exalted sense; the Gospel teaching, that *God hath given to us Christians the Holy Spirit*[b], to be with us, and in us; to purify and comfort us: that we are *baptized by this spirit*[c], sanctified, *sealed by it to the day of redemption*[d].

Now this being the case, the *body* of a Christian, which the Holy Ghost inhabits and sanctifies by his presence, is no longer to be considered as a worthless fabrick, to be put to sordid uses, but as the receptacle of God's spirit, as the place of his residence; in a word, as his TEMPLE and sanctuary.

The figure, you see, presents an idea the most august and venerable. It carried this impression with it both to the Gentile and Jewish Christians. It did so to the Gentiles, whose

[a] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.
[b] 1 Thess. iv. 8.
[c] Acts xi. 16.
[d] Eph. i. 13.

superstitious reverence for their idol-temples is well known: and though many an abominable rite was done in them, yet the nature of the Deity, occupying this temple, which was the Holy Ghost, put an infinite difference between him and their impure deities, the impurest of which had engrossed the Corinthian worship. So that this contrast of the object could not but raise their ideas, and impress the reverence, which the Apostle would excite in them for such a temple, with full effect on their minds[e]. And then to Jews, the allusion must be singularly striking: for their supreme pride and boast was, the temple at Jerusalem, *the tabernacle of the most high, dwelling between the cherubims, and the place of the habitation of God's glory*[f].

To both Jew and Gentile, the notion of a temple implied these two things, 1. That the divinity was in a more especial manner present in it: and, 2. That it was a place peculiarly set apart for his service. Whence the effect of this re-

[e] It was the easier to do this, as the Heathens had their Minerva and Diana, as well as grosser deities; and their vestal virgins too; though, I doubt, in less numbers than the shameless votaries of the Corinthian Venus.

See STRABO, L. viii. p. 378. Par. 1620.

[f] Ps. xlvi. 4.—lxxx. 1.—xxvi. 8.

presentation would be, That the body, having the Holy Spirit lodged within it, was to be kept pure and clean for this cælestial inhabitant: and, as being dedicated to his own use, it was not to be prophaned by any indecencies, much less by a gross sin, which is, emphatically, *a sin against the body*, and by heathens themselves accounted a *pollution* [g] of it.

Further; the Apostle does not leave the Corinthians to collect all this from the image presented to them, but asserts it expressly; *What! know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost*, WHICH IS IN YOU: Implying, that what they would naturally infer from their idea of a temple, was true, in fact, *that the Holy Ghost was in them;* that his actual occupancy and possession of their bodies appropriated the use of them to himself, and excluded all sordid practices in them, as prophane and SACRILEGIOUS. Nay, he further adds; AND WHICH [Holy Ghost] YE HAVE OF GOD: ye have received this adorable spirit, *which is in you*, from God himself; and so are obliged to entertain this heavenly guest with all sanctity and reverence; not only for his own sake, and for the honour he does you

[g] Nullis POLLUITUR casta domus stupris. HOR.
Cum castum amisit POLLUTO CORPORE florem. CATUL.

in dwelling in you, but for his sake who sent him, and from whose hands ye have received him.

This first argument, then, against the sin of uncleanness, divested of its figure, stands thus. In consequence of your Christian profesion, ye must acknowledge, that the Holy Spirit is given to inform and consecrate your mortal bodies; that he is actually *within* you; and that he dwells and operates there, by the gracious appointment and commission of God. Ye are therefore to consider your body as the place of his more especial habitation; and as such, are bound to preserve it in such purity, as the nature of so sacred a presence demands.

This is the clear, obvious, and conclusive argument; liable to no objection, or even cavil, from a professor of Christianity. The figure of a temple is only employed to raise our apprehensions, and to convey the conclusion with more force and energy to our minds. But now,

II. The Apostle proceeds to another and distinct consideration, and shews that the Holy Ghost is not only the actual *occupier and*

*possessor* of the body of Christians, whom the Almighty had, as it were, forced upon them, and by his sovereign authority enjoined them to receive, but that he was the true and rightful PROPRIETOR of it. YE ARE NOT YOUR OWN, continues the Apostle; not merely, as "God "hath, by his spirit, taken possession of you, "and sealed you up, as his own proper "goods[h];" but as he hath redeemed and purchased you, as he hath done that, by which the *property* ye might before seem to have in your bodies, is actually made over and consigned to him. FOR YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE.

The expression is, again, figurative; and refers to the notions and usages that obtained among the heathens, the Greeks especially, in regard to *personal slavery*. As passionate admirers, as they were, of liberty, every government, even the most republican, abounded in slaves; every family had its share of them. The purchase of them, as of brute beasts, was a considerable part of their traffick. Men and women were bought and sold publicly in their markets: the wealth of states and of individuals, in great measure, consisted in them. Thus was human nature degraded by the

[h] Dr. Whitby on the place.

Heathen, and I wish it might be said, by heathens only. But my present concern is with them. It is too sad a truth that human creatures sold themselves, or were sold by their masters, to be employed in the basest services, even those of luxury and of lust. This infamous practice was common through all Greece, but was more especially a chief branch of the Corinthian commerce. Their city was the head-quarters of prostitution, and the great market for the supply of it.

Now to this practice the Apostle alludes, but in such a manner as implies the severest reproof of it. His remonstrance is to this effect. "Ye Corinthians, in your former "pagan state, made no scruple to consider "your slaves as your own absolute property. "Your pretence was, that *ye had bought them* "*with a price*; that is, with a piece of money, "which could be no equivalent for the natural "inestimable liberty and dignity of a fellow-"creature; yet ye claimed to yourselves their "entire, unreserved service; and often con-"demned them to the vilest and most igno-"minious.

"To turn now, says the Apostle, from "these horrors to a fairer scene; for I take ad-

" vantage only of your ideas in this matter, to
" lead you to just notions of your present
" Christian condition. God, the sole rightful
" proprietor of the persons of men, left you
" in the state of nature, to the enjoyment of
" your own liberty, with no other restraint
" upon it than what was necessary to preserve
" so great a blessing, the restraint of reason.
" Now, indeed, but still for your own infinite
" benefit, he claims a stricter property in you,
" and demands your more peculiar service.
" He first made you men, but now Christians.
" Still he condescends to proceed with you in
" your own way, and according to your own
" ideas of right and justice. *He has bought*
" *you with a price:* but, merciful heaven,
" with *what* price? With that, which exceeds
" all value and estimation, with the BLOOD of
" his only begotten Son; the least drop of
" which is of more virtue than all your heca-
" tombs, and more precious than the treasures
" of the East. And for what was this price
" paid? Not to enslave, much less to insult
" and corrupt you (as ye wickedly served one
" another), but to *redeem you into the glo-*
" *rious liberty of the sons of God:* It was,
" to restore you from death to life, from ser-
" vitude to freedom, from corruption to holi-
" ness, *to make to himself a peculiar people,*

"*zealous of good works.* Say, then, Is this "ransom an equivalent for the purchase of "you? And is the end for which ye are pur-"chased, such as ye dare complain of, or have "reason to refuse? Henceforth, then, *ye are* "*not your own*: the property of your souls "and bodies is freely, justly, equitably, with "immense benefit to yourselves, and unspeak-"able mercy on the part of the purchaser, "transferred to God. Your whole and best "service is due to him, of strict right: what "he demands of you is to serve him in all "virtue and godliness of living, and particu-"larly to respect and reverence yourselves; in "a word, not to pollute yourselves with for-"bidden lusts. In this way ye are required "to serve your new lord and master, who has "the goodness to regard such service, as an "honour and glory to himself. *Therefore,* "do your part inviolably and conscientiously, "*Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,* "*which are God's.*"

This is the the Apostle's idea, when drawn out and explained at large. The reasoning is decisive, as in the former case: and the expression admirably adapted to the circumstances of the persons addressed. In plain words, the argument is this. God has pro-

vided, by the sacrifice of the death of Christ, for your redemption from all iniquity, both the service, and the wages of it. By your profession of Christianity, and free acceptance of this inestimable benefit, freely offered to you, ye are become in a more especial manner, his servants: ye are bound, therefore, by every motive of duty and self-interest to preserve yourselves in all that purity of mind and body, which his laws require of you; and for the sake of which ye were taken into this nearer relation to himself. The figure of being *bought with a price*, was at once the most natural cover of this reasoning, as addressed to the Corinthian Christians; and the most poignant reproof of their country's inhuman practice of trafficking in the bodies and souls of men.

The force both of the *figure* and the *reasoning* is apparently much weakened by this minute comment upon the Apostle's words, which yet seemed necessary to make them understood.

To draw to a point, then, the substance of what has been said, and to conclude.

The vice which the Apostle had been arguing against, is condemned by natural reason. But

Christians are bound by additional and peculiar considerations to abstain from it. YE, says the Apostle, ARE THE TEMPLES OF THE HOLY GHOST. To defile yourselves with the sins of uncleanness is, then, to desecrate those bodies which the Holy Ghost sanctifies by his presence. It is, in the emphatic language of scripture, *to grieve the holy Spirit*, and *to do despite to the spirit of grace*. It is like, nay it is infinitely worse, than polluting the sanctuary: an abomination, which nature itself teaches all men to avoid and execrate. It is, in the highest sense of the words, PROPHANENESS, IMPIETY, SACRILEGE.

Again; YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE: ye are not your own, but God's; having been ransomed by him, your souls and bodies, when both were lost, through the death of his Son: a price, of so immense, so inestimable a value, that worlds are not equal to it. To dispose of yourselves, then, in a way which he forbids and abhors: to corrupt by your impurities that which belongs to God, which is his right and property; to serve your lusts, when ye are redeemed at such a price to serve God only, through Jesus Christ; is an outrage which we poorly express, when language affords no other names for it, than those of INGRATITUDE, INFIDELITY, INJUSTICE.

Whatever excuses a poor heathen might alledge to palliate this sin, we Christians have none to offer. He, *who knew not God*, might be led by his pride, by his passions, and even by his religion, to conclude (as the idolatrous Corinthians seem to have done) that *his own body was for fornication*; or, at most, that he was only accountable to *his own soul* (if his philosophy would give him leave to think he had one) for the misuse of it. But this language is now out of date. The souls and bodies of us Christians are not ours, but the *Lord's*: they are *occupied* by his spirit, and *appropriated* to his service. The conclusion follows, and cannot be inforced in stronger terms than those of the text: THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY, AND IN YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH ARE GOD'S.

# SERMON XXVII.

PREACHED MARCH 13, 1774.

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JOB xxiii. 26.

*Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.*

THIS is one of the complaints which Job makes in his expostulations with the Almighty. He thought it hard measure that he should suffer, now in his riper years, for the iniquities of his youth. He could charge himself with no other; and therefore he hoped that these had been forgotten.

Job is all along represented as an eminently virtuous person; so that the iniquities of his

his youth might not have been numerous or considerable: otherwise, he would not have thought it strange, that he was *made to possess* his sins, long after they had been committed. Our experience is, in this respect, so constant and uniform, that there is no room for surprize or expostulation. All those who have passed their youth in sin and folly, may with reason express a very strong resentment against themselves; but have no ground of complaint against God, when they cry out, in the anguish of their souls: *Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.*

The words are peculiarly strong and energetic; and may be considered distinctly from the case of Job, as expressing this general proposition; "That, in the order of things, an ill-spent youth derives many lasting evils on the subsequent periods of life." An alarming truth! which cannot be too much considered, and should especially be set before the young and unexperienced, in the strongest light.

The sins of *youth,* as distinguished from those of riper years, are chiefly such as are occasioned by an immoderate, or an irregular pursuit of pleasure; into which we are too easily

carried in that careless part of life; and the ill effects of which are rarely apprehended by us, till they are severely felt.

Now, it may be said of us, that we are made to POSSESS these sins, "When *we continue under the constant sense and unrepented guilt of them:*" "When *we labour under tyrannous habits, which they have produced:*" And, "when *we groan under afflictions of various kinds, which they have entailed upon us.*"

In these three respects, I mean to shew how *bitter those things are, which God writeth*, that is, decreeth in his justice, *against the iniquities of our youth.*

I. The *first*, and bitterest effect of this indulgence in vicious pleasure, is the guilt and consequent remorse of conscience, we derive from it.

When the young mind has been tinctured in any degree with the principles of modesty and virtue, it is with reluctance and much apprehension, that it first ventures on the transgression of known duty. But the vivacity and thoughtless gaiety of that early season, encouraged by the hopes of new pleasure, and

sollicited, as it commonly happens, by ill examples, is at length tempted to make the fatal experiment; by which guilt is contracted, and the sting of guilt first known. The ingenuous mind reflects with shame and compunction on this miscarriage: but the passion revives; the temptation returns, and prevails a second time, and a third; still with growing guilt, but unhappily with something less horror; yet enough to admonish the offender of his fault, and to embitter his enjoyments.

As no instant mischief, perhaps, is felt from this indulgence, but the pain of remorse, he, by degrees, imputes this effect to an overtimorous apprehension, to his too delicate self-esteem, or to the prejudice of education. He next confirms himself in these sentiments, by observing the practice of the world, by listening to the libertine talk of his companions, and by forming, perhaps, a sort of system to himself, by which he pretends to vindicate his own conduct: till, at length, his shame and his fears subside; he grows intrepid in vice, and riots in all the intemperance to which youth invites, and high spirits transport him.

In this delirious state he continues for some time. But presently the scene changes. Al-

though the habit continue, the enjoyment is not the same: the keenness of appetite abates, and the cares of life succeed to this run of pleasure.

But neither the cares nor the pleasures of life can now keep him from reflexion. He cannot help giving way, at times, to a serious turn of thought; and some unwelcome event or other will strike in to promote it. Either the loss of a friend makes him grave; or a fit of illness sinks his spirits; or it may be sufficient, that the companions of his idle hours are withdrawn, and that he is left to himself in longer intervals than he would chuse, of solitude and recollection.

By some or other of these means CONSCIENCE revives in him, and with a quick resentment of the outrage she has suffered. Attempts to suppress her indignant reproaches, are no longer effectual: she *will* be heared; and her voice carries terror and consternation with it.

"She upbraids him, first, with his loss of virtue, and of that which died with it, her own favour and approbation. She then sets before him the indignity of having renounced

all self-command, and of having served ingloriously under every idle, every sordid appetite. She next rises in her remonstrance; represents to him the baseness of having attempted unsuspecting innocence; the cruelty of having alarmed, perhaps destroyed, the honour of deserving families; the fraud, the perfidy, the perjury, he has possibly committed in carrying on his iniquitous purposes. The mischiefs he has done to others are perhaps not to be repaired; and his own personal crimes remain to be accounted for; and, if at all, can only be expiated by the bitterest repentance. And what then, concludes this severe monitor in the awful words of the Apostle, *What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death*[a]."

Suppose now this remonstrance to take effect, and that the sinner is at length (for what I have here represented in few words, takes much time in doing; but suppose, I say, that the sinner is at length) wrought upon by this remonstrance to entertain some serious thoughts of amendment, still the consciousness of his ill desert will attend him through every stage

[a] Rom. vi. 21.

of life, and corrupt the sincerity of all his enjoyments; while he knows not what will be the issue of his crimes, or whether, indeed, he shall ever be able truly and effectually to repent of them. For we cannot get quit of our sins, the moment we resolve to do so: But, as I proposed to shew,

II. *In the second place,* we are still made to possess the iniquities of our youth, *while we labour under any remains of those tyrannous habits, which they have produced in us.*

There is scarce an object of greater compassion, than the man who is duly sensible of his past misconduct, earnestly repents of it, and strives to reform it, but yet is continually drawn back into his former miscarriages, by the very habit of having so frequently fallen into them. Such a man's life is a perpetual scene of contradiction; a discordant mixture of good resolutions, and weak performances; of virtuous purposes, and shameful relapses; in a word, of sin and sorrow. And, were he only to consult his present ease, an uninterrupted course of vice might almost seem preferable to this intermitting state of virtue. But the misery of this condition comes from himself, and must be endured, for the sake of

avoiding, if it may be, one that is much worse. In the mean time, he feels most sensibly what it is to *possess* the iniquities of his youth. The temptation, perhaps, to persevere in them, is not great; he condemns, and laments his own weakness. Still the habit prevails, and his repentance, though constantly renewed, is unable to disengage him from the power of it.

Thus he struggles with himself, perhaps for many years, perhaps for a great part of his life; and in all that time is distracted by the very inconsistency of his own conduct, and tortured by the bitterest pains of compunction and self-abhorrence.

But let it be supposed, that the grace of God at length prevails over the tyranny of his inveterate habits; that his repentance is efficacious, and his virtue established. Yet the memory of his former weakness fills him with fears and apprehensions: he finds his mind weakened, as well as polluted, by his past sins; he has to strive against the returning influence of them; and thus, when penitence and tears have washed away his guilt, he still thinks himself insecure, and trembles at the possible danger of being involved again in it.

Add to all this, the compunction which such a man feels, when he is obliged to discountenance in others, perhaps, by his station, to punish those crimes in which he had so long, and so freely indulged himself: and how uneasy the very discharge of his duty is thus rendered to him.

To say all upon this head: his acquired habits, if not corrected in due time, may push him into crimes the most attrocious and shocking; and, if subdued at length, will agitate his mind with long dissatisfaction and disquiet. Repentance, if it comes at all, will come late; and will never reinstate him fully in the serenity and composure of his lost innocence. But,

III. Lastly, when all this is done (and more to do is not in our power) we may still possess the iniquities of our youth, in another sense, I mean, *when we groan under the temporal afflictions of many kinds, which they entail upon us.*

So close do these sad *possessions* cleave to us, and so difficult it is, contrary to what we observe of all other possessions, to divest ourselves of them!

When PLEASURE first spreads its snare for the young voluptuary, how little did he suspect the malignity of its nature; and that under so enchanting an appearance, it was preparing for him pains and diseases, declining health, an early old-age, perhaps poverty, infamy, and irreparable ruin? Yet some, or all of these calamities may oppress him, when the pleasure is renounced, and the sin forsaken.

Youth and health are with difficulty made to comprehend how frail a machine the human body is, and how easily impaired by excesses. But effects will follow their causes; and intemperate pleasure is sure to be succeeded by long pains, for which there is no prevention, and for the most part, no remedy. Hence it is that life is shortened; and, while it lasts, is full of languor, disease, and suffering. If by living *fast*, as men call it, they only abridged the duration of their pleasures, their folly might seem tolerable. But the case is much worse: they treasure up to themselves actual sufferings, from disorders which have no cure, as well as no name. And not unfrequently it happens, according to the strong expression in the book of Job, that *a man's bones are full of the sin of his youth, till they lie down with him in the grave* [a].

[a] Job xx. 11.

Or, if health continue, his *fortune* suffers; it being an observation as old as Solomon, and confirmed by constant experience ever since, that *he who loveth pleasure, shall not be rich*[b]. His paternal inheritance is perhaps wasted, or much reduced. And his careless youth has lost the opportunity of those improvements which should enable him to repair it. Or, if the abundant provision of wiser ancestors secure him from this mischance; or, if he has had the discretion to mix some industry and oeconomy with his vices, still his good name is blasted, and so tender a plant as this is not easily restored to health and vigour. For it is a mistake to think that intemperance leaves no lasting disgrace behind it. The contrary is seen every day; and the crimes which we commit in the mad pursuit of pleasure, bring a dishonour with them, which no age can wholly outlive, and no virtue can repair[c]. It stuck close to Cæsar himself in his highest fortune: All his laurels could neither hide his *baldness* from the observation of men, nor the infamy of that commerce by which it had been occasioned[d].

[b] Prov. xxi. 17.

[c] The poet says well of such *stains*, as these;

*Impressæ resident nec eluentur.* CATULL.

[d] SUET. J. Cæsar, c. 45.

All this, it may be thought, is very hard. But such is the fact, and such the order of God's providence. We have not the making of this system; it is made to our hands by him who ordereth all things for the best, how grievous soever his dispensations may sometimes appear to us. Our duty, and our wisdom is to reflect what that system is, and to conform ourselves to it.

If a young man, on his entrance into life, could be made duly sensible of the dreadful evils, which, in the very constitution of things, flow from vice, there is scarcely any temptation that could prevail over his virtue. But his levity and inexperience expose him to these evils: he thinks nothing of them till they arrive, and then there is no escape from them.

To conclude: if any thing can rescue unwary youth out of the hands of their own folly, it must be such a train of reflexion as the text offers to us. Let it sink deep into their minds, that there are indeed *bitter things* decreed against the iniquities of that early age; that a thousand temporal evils spring from that source; that vicious habits are in themselves vexatious and tormenting; and, that, uncor-

rected, and unrepented of, they fill the mind with inutterable remorse and horror.

When the sins of youth are seen in this light, it is not by giving them the soft name of infirmities, or by cloathing them with ideas of pleasure, that we shall be able to reconcile the mind to them. Such thin disguises will not conceal their true forms and natures from us. We shall still take them for what indeed they are, for sorcerers and assassins, the enchanters of our reason and the murderers of our peace.

The sum of all is comprised in that memorable advice of the Psalmist, so often quoted in this place (and, for once, let it have its effect upon us): *Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last*[c].

Or, if the scorner will not listen to this advice, it only remains to leave him to his own sad experience; but not till we have made one charitable effort more to provoke his attention by the caustic apostrophe of the wise man: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy*

[c] Ps. xxxvii. 38.

*youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but* KNOW THOU, *that, for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment* [f].

[f] Eccles. c. xi. 9.

# SERMON XXVIII.

PREACHED MAY 28, 1769.

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ECCLESIASTES vii. 21, 22.

*Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. For oftentimes, also, thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself, likewise, hast cursed others.*

THE royal author of this book has been much and justly celebrated for his wise aphorisms and precepts on the conduct of human life. Among others of this sort, the text may deserve to be had in reverence; which, though simply and familiarly expressed, could only be the reflexion of a man who had great

experience of the world, and had studied with care the secret workings of his own mind.

The purpose of it is, to disgrace and discountenance that ANXIOUS CURIOSITY (the result of our vanity, and a misguided self-love) which prompts us to inquire into the sentiments and opinions of other persons concerning us, and to give ourselves no rest till we understand what, in their private and casual conversations, they say of us.

"This curious disposition, says the preacher, is by all means to be repressed, as the indulgence of it is both FOOLISH and UNJUST; as it not only serves to embitter your own lives by the unwelcome discoveries ye are most likely to make; but at the same time to convict your own consciences of much iniquity; since, upon reflexion, ye will find that ye have, yourselves, been guilty at some unguarded hour or other, of the same malignity or flippancy towards other men."

In these TWO considerations is comprised whatever can be said to discredit this vice: the *one*, you see, taken from the preacher's knowledge of human life; the *other*, from his intimate acquaintance with the secret depravity and corruption of the human heart.

Permit me, then, to enlarge on these two topics; and, by that means, to open to you more distinctly the WISDOM, and the EQUITY of that conduct, which is here recommended to us, of *not giving a sollicitous attention to the frivolous and unweighed censures of other men.*

I. *Take no heed,* says the preacher, *to all words that are spoken,* LEST THOU HEAR THY SERVANT CURSE THEE. This is the FIRST reason which he assigns for his advice.

The force of it will be clearly apprehended, if we reflect (as the observing author of the text had certainly done) that nothing is more flippant, nothing more unreasonably and unaccountably petulant, than the tongue of man.

It is so little under the controul, I do not say of candour, or of good-nature, but of common prudence, and of common justice, that it moves, as it were, with the slightest breath of rumour; nay, as if a tendency to speak ill of others were instinctive to it, it waits many times for no cause from without, but is prompted as we may say, by its own restlessness and volubility to attack the characters of those who chance to be the subject of discourse. With-

out provocation, without malice, without so much as intentional ill-will, it echoes the voice of the present company; vibrates with the prevailing tone of conversation; or takes occasion from the slightest occurrence, from some idle conceit that strikes the fancy, from the impulse of a sudden and half-formed suggestion, that stirs within us, to exercise its activity in a careless censure of other men.

Nay, what is more to be lamented, the sagacious observer of mankind will find reason to conclude, that no zeal for our interests, no kindness for our persons, shall at all times restrain this unruly member, the tongue, from taking unwelcome freedoms with us. The dearest friend we have, shall at some unlucky moment be seduced by an affectation of wit, by a start of humour, by a flow of spirits, by a sudden surmise, or indisposition, by any thing, in short, to let fall such things of us, as have some degree of sharpness in them, and would give us pain, if they were officiously reported to us.

This appears to have been the sentiment of the wise preacher in the text. Avoid, says he, this impertinent curiosity, *lest thou hear thy servant curse thee*; lest the very persons that

live under thy roof and are most obliged to thee, who are reasonably presumed to have the warmest concern for thy honour and interest, and on whose fidelity and gratitude the security and comfort of thy whole life more immediately depends, lest even these be found to make free with thy character. For there is a time, when even *these* may be carried to speak undutifully and disrespectfully of thee.

And would any man wish to make this discovery of those, who are esteemed to be, and, notwithstanding these occasional freedoms, perhaps *are*, his true servants and affectionate friends?

For think not, when this unlucky discovery is made, that the offended party will treat it with neglect, or be in a condition to consider it with those allowances, that, in reason and equity, may be required of him. No such thing: It will appear to him in the light of a heinous and unpardonable indignity; it will occasion warm resentments, and not only fill his mind with present disquiet, but most probably provoke him to severe expostulations; the usual fruit of which is, to make a deliberate and active enemy of him, who was, before, only an incautious and indiscreet friend; at the

best, it will engender I know not what uneasy jealousies and black suspicions; which will mislead his judgment on many occasions; and inspire an anxious distrust, not of the faulty person himself only, but of others, who stand in the same relation to him, and, perhaps, of all mankind.

These several ill effects may be supposed, as I said, to flow from the discovery: and it will be useful to set the malignity of *each* in its true and proper light.

1. *First*, then, consider that a likely, or rather infallible effect of this discovery, is, *to fire the mind with quick and passionate resentments*. And what is it to be in this state, but to lose the enjoyment of ourselves; to have the relish of every thing, we possess, embittered by pungent reflexions on the perfidy and baseness of those, with whom we live, and of whom it is our happiness to think well; to have the repose of our lives disturbed by the most painful of all sensations, that of supposed injury from our very friends? And for what is this wretchedness, this misery, encountered? For the idleness of an unweighed discourse; for something, which, if kept secret from us, had been perfectly insignificant; for a dis-

courtesy, which meant nothing and tended to nothing; for a word, which came from the tongue, rather than the heart; or, if the heart had any share in producing it, was recalled perhaps, at least forgotten, in the moment it was spoken. And can it be worth while to indulge a curiosity which leads to such torment, when the object of our inquiry is itself so frivolous, as well as the concern we have in it?

2. *Another* mischief attending the gratification of this impertinent curiosity, is, That the unwelcome discoveries we make, *naturally lead to peevish complaints and severe expostulations;* the effect of which is, not only to continue and inflame the sense of the injury already received, but to draw fresh and greater indignities on ourselves, to push the offending party on extremes, and compell him, almost, whether he will or no, to open acts of hostility against us. The former ill treatment of us, whatever it might be, was perhaps forgotten; at least it had hitherto gone no further than words, and, while it was, or was supposed to be, undiscovered, there was no thought of repeating the provocation, and there was time and opportunity left for repenting of it, and for recovering a just sense of violated

duty. But when the offence is understood to be no longer a secret, the discovery provokes fresh offences. Either pride puts the aggressor on justifying what he has done; or the shame of conviction, and the despair of pardon, turns indifference into hate; ready to break out into all sorts of ill offices, and the readier, because the strong resentment of so slight a matter, as a careless expression, is itself, in turn, accounted an atrocious injury. And thus a small discourtesy, which, if unnoticed, had presently died away, shall grow and spread into a rooted *ill-will*, productive of gross reciprocal hostilities, and permanent as life itself.

It is on this account that wise men have always thought it better to connive at moderate injuries, than, by an open resentment of them, to provoke greater: and nothing is mentioned so much to the honour of a noble Roman[a], as that, when he had the papers of an enemy in his hands (which would certainly have discovered the disaffection of many persons towards the republic and himself) he destroyed them all; and prudently, as well as generously, resolved to know nothing of what they con-

[a] Pompey, who burnt the papers of Sertorius.

tained. And this conduct, which was thought so becoming a great man in public life, is unquestionably (on the same principle of prudence and magnanimity, to say nothing of higher motives) the duty and concern of every private man.

3. But, *lastly*, supposing the resentment conceived on the discovery of an ungrateful secret, should not break out into overt acts of hatred and revenge, still the matter would not be much mended. For, *it would surely breed a thousand uneasy suspicions*, which would prey on the hurt mind; and do irreparable injury to the moral character, as well as embitter the whole life of him who was unhappily conscious to them.

The experience of such neglect or infidelity in those whom we had hitherto loved and trusted, and from whom we had expected a suitable return of trust and love, would infallibly sour the temper, and create a constant apprehension of future unkindness. It would efface the native candour of the mind, and bring a cloud of jealousy over it, which would darken our views of human life. It would make us cold, and gloomy, and reserved; indifferent to those who deserved best of us, and unapt

for the offices of society and friendship. The more we suppressed these sentiments, the more would they fester and rankle within us; till the mind became all over tenderness and sensibility, and felt equal pain from its own groundless surmises, as from real substantial injuries. In a word, we should have no relish of conversation, no sincere enjoyment of any thing, we should only be miserable *in*, and *from* ourselves.

And is this a condition to be officiously courted, and sought after? Or rather, could we suffer more from the malice of our bitterest enemy, than we are ready to do from our own anxious curiosity to pry into the infirmities of our friends?

HITHERTO I have insisted on the danger of *giving heed to all words that are spoken*, LEST THOU HEAR THY SERVANT CURSE THEE; in other words, on the FOLLY of taking pains to make a discovery, which may prove unwelcome in itself, and dreadful in the consequent evils it may derive upon us.

II. It now remains that I say one word on the INJUSTICE, and want of equity, which appears in this practice. FOR OFTENTIMES ALSO

THINE OWN HEART KNOWETH, THAT THOU THYSELF, LIKEWISE, HAST CURSED OTHERS.

And as in the former case the preacher drew his remonstrance from his knowledge of the world; so in this, he reasons from his intimate knowledge of the human heart.

Let the friendliest, the best man living, explore his own conscience, and then let him tell us, or rather let him tell himself, if he can, that he has never offended in the instance here given. I suppose, on a strict inquiry, he will certainly call to mind some peevish sentiment, some negligent censure, some sharp reflection, which, at times, hath escaped him, even in regard to his *second self*, a bosom friend. Either he took something wrong, and some suspicious circumstance misled him; or, he was out of health and spirits; or, he was ruffled by some ungrateful accident; or, he had forgotten himself in an hour of levity; or a splenetic moment had surprised him. Some or other of these causes, he will find, had betrayed him into a sudden warmth and asperity of expression, which he is now ashamed and sorry for, and hath long since retracted and condemned.

*Still further*, at the very time when this infirmity overtook him, he had no purposed unfriendliness, no resolved disaffection towards the person he allowed himself to be thus free with. His tongue indeed had offended, but his heart had scarce consented to the offence. The next day, the next hour, perhaps, he would gladly have done all service, possibly he would not have declined to hazard his life, for this abused friend.

I appeal, as the wise author of the text does, to yourselves, to the inmost recollection of your own thoughts, if ye do not know and feel that this which I have described hath sometimes been your own case. And what then is the inference from this self-conviction? Certainly, that ye ought in common justice, to restrain your inclination of prying into the unguarded moments of other men. If your best friends have not escaped your flippancy, where is the equity of demanding more reserve and caution towards yourself from them? Without doubt the proper rule is to suppose, and to forgive, these mutual indiscretions, which we are all ready to commit towards each other. We should lay no stress on these casual discourtesies; we should not desire to be made acquainted with them; we should

dismiss them, if some officious whisperer bring the information to us, with indifference and neglect. To do otherwise is not only to vex and disquiet ourselves for trifles: It is to be unfair, uncandid, and *unjust*, in our dealings with others; it is to convict ourselves of partiality and hypocrisy, *For thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself likewise hast done the same thing.*

Ye have now, then, before you the substance of those considerations which the text offers, for the prevention of that idle and hurtful curiosity of looking into the secret dispositions and discourses of other men. Ye see how foolish, how dangerous, how iniquitous it is, *to give heed to all words that are spoken.*

It becomes a man indeed to lay a severe check and restraint on his own tongue. Far better would it be, if all men did so. But they who know themselves and others, will not much expect this degree of self-government, will not, if they be wise, be much scandalized at the want of it; since they know the observance of it is so difficult and sublime a virtue; since they know that nothing less than extraordinary wisdom can, at all times, prevent the

tongue of man from running into excesses; since they are even told by an Apostle, *That if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man* [b].

Let us then allow for what we cannot well help. And let this consideration come in aid of the others, employed in the text, to expell an inveterate folly, which prompts us to lay more stress upon words, than such frivolous and fugitive things deserve. Let us regard them, for the most part, but as the shaking of a leaf, or the murmur of the idle air: they rarely merit our notice, and attention, more: or, when they do, we should find it better to indulge our *charity*, than our curiosity; I mean, to *believe well of others*, as long as we can, rather than be at the pains of an anxious inquiry for a pretence to *think ill* of them.

[b] James iii. 2.

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